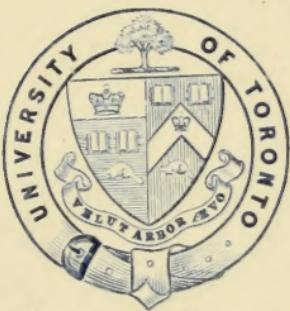


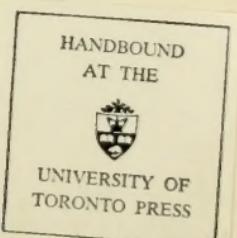
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9899 I

Plays of Near & Far

(including If)

38

By LORD DUNSANY

- THE GODS OF PEGANA
TIME AND THE GODS
THE SWORD OF WELLERAN
A DREAMER'S TALES
THE BOOK OF WONDER
FIVE PLAYS
FIFTY-ONE TALES
TALES OF WONDER
PLAYS OF GODS AND MEN
TALES OF WAR
UNHAPPY FAR-OFF THINGS
TALES OF THREE HEMISPHERES
THE CHRONICLES OF RODRIGUEZ

Plays of Near & Far (including If)

By
Lord Dunsany

181210
9. 6. 23.

G. P. Putnam's Sons
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IF

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PREFACE

BELIEVING plays to be solely for the stage, I have never before allowed any of mine to be printed until they had first faced from a stage the judgment of an audience, to see if they were entitled to be called plays at all. A successful production also has been sometimes a moral support to me when some critic has said, as for instance of "A Night at an Inn," that though it reads passably it could never act.

But in this book I have made an exception to this good rule (as it seems to me), and that exception is "The Flight of the Queen." I know too little of managers and theatres to know what to do with it, and have a feeling that it will be long before it is ever acted, and am too fond of this play to leave it any longer in obscurity. This beautiful story has been lying about the world for countless centuries, without ever having been dramatized. It is the story of a royal court, which I have merely adapted to the stage. The date that I have given is accurate; it happened in June; and happens every June; perhaps in some corner of the reader's garden. It is the story of the bees.

As for "The Compromise of the King of the Golden Isles," it is just the sort of play through which those that hunt for allegories might hunt merrily, unless I mention that there are no allegories in any of my plays.

PREFACE

An allegory I take to be a dig at something local and limited, such as politics, while outwardly appearing to tell of things on some higher plane. But, far from being the *chef d'œuvre* of some ponderously profound thinker, I look on the allegory, if I have rightly defined it, as being the one form of art that is narrowly limited in its application to life. When the man whose cause it championed has been elected alderman, when the esplanade has been widened, or the town better lighted or drained, the allegory's work must necessarily be over; but the truth of all other works of art is manifold and should be eternal.

Though there is no such land as the Golden Isles and was never any such king as Hamaran, yet all that we write with sincerity is true, for we can reflect nothing that we have not seen, and this we interpret with our idiosyncracies when we attempt any form of art.

I set some store by the way in which the three lines about Zarabardes are recited, though it is hard to explain in writing a matter of rhythm. But the heartlessness of it can be indicated by a clear pronunciation of the syllables, as though the people that utter these words had long been drilled in a formula.

The third play, "Cheezo," tells of one of those rare occasions when it is permissible for an artist, and may be a duty, to leave his wider art in order to attack a definite evil. And the invention of "great new foods" is often a huge evil.

PREFACE

“Cheezo” is a play of Right and Wrong, and Wrong triumphs. Were not this particular wrong triumphing at this particular date I should not have thought it a duty to attack it, and were it easily defeated it would not have been worth attacking.

I have seen it acted with a Stage Curate, rather weak and a little comic; obviously such a man could be no match for Sladder. Hippanthigh should be of stronger stuff than that: he is defeated because that particular evil is, as I have said, defeating its enemies at present. Nor could there be any drama in a contest between the brutal Sladder and a Stage Curate; for the spark that we call humour, by whose light we see much of life, comes as it were of two flints, and not of a flint and cheese.

The play called “If” is set in motion by John Beal’s belief that “a little thing like that can’t alter the future,” a point that his logic demonstrates. But Fate turns out to be stronger than John’s Beal’s logic.

An axiom of this play is, as Ali states several times, that at the end of the ten years, whatever he be, wherever he has been living, the crystal must bring John Beal to The Acacias. The other axiom is that what those ten years have made him is irrevocable, and he must go straight on from the point, whatever it be, at which those years have left him. But even as John Beal forgot the power of Fate, so the god of jade, whose terrible power

PREFACE

was in the crystal, overlooked the destructive potentiality of the housemaid.

The three little plays at the end of the book I will leave to speak for themselves, as ultimately all plays have to do.

DUNSANY

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IF

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

JOHN BEAL.

MARY BEAL.

LIZA.

ALI.

BILL } two railway porters.
BERT }

THE MAN IN THE CORNER.

MIRALDA CLÉMENT.

HAFIZ EL ALCOLAHN.

DAOUD.

ARCHIE BEAL.

BAZZALOL } two Nubian door keepers.
THOOOTHOOBABA }

BEN HUSSEIN, *Lord of the Pass.*

ZABNOOL } two conjurors.
SHABEESH }

OMAR, *a singer.*

ZAGBOOLA, *mother of Hafiz.*

THE SHEIK OF THE BISHAREENS.

Notables, soldiers, Bishareens, dancers, etc.

IF

ACT I. SCENE I

A small railway station near London.

Time : Ten years ago.

BERT : 'Ow goes it, Bill ?

BILL : Goes it ? 'Ow d'yer think it goes ?

BERT : I don't know, Bill. 'Ow is it ?

BILL : Bloody.

BERT : Why ? What's wrong ?

BILL : Wrong ? Nothing ain't wrong.

BERT : What's up then ?

BILL : Nothing ain't right.

BERT : Why, wot's the worry ?

BILL : Wot's the worry ? They don't give you better wages nor a dog, and then they thinks they can talk at yer and talk at yer, and say wot they likes, like.

BERT : Why ? You been on the carpet, Bill ?

BILL : Ain't I ! Proper.

BERT : Why, wot about, Bill ?

BILL : Wot about ? I'll tell yer. Just coz I let a lidy get into a train. That's wot about. Said I ought to 'av stopped

'er. Thought the train was moving.
Thought it was dangerous. Thought
I tried to murder 'er, I suppose.

BERT: Wot? The other day?

BILL: Yes.

BERT: Tuesday?

BILL: Yes.

BERT: Why. The one that dropped her bag?

BILL: Yes. Drops 'er bag. Writes to the
company. They writes back she
shouldn't 'av got in. She writes back
she should. Then they gets on to me.
Any more of it and I'll . . .

BERT: I wouldn't, Bill; don't you.

BILL: I will.

BERT: Don't you, Bill. You've got your family to
consider.

BILL: Well, anyway, I won't let any more of
them passengers go jumping into trains
any more, not when they're moving, I
won't. When the train gets in, doors
shut. That's the rule. And they'll 'ave
to abide by it.

BERT: Well, I wouldn't stop one, not if . . .

BILL: I don't care. They ain't going to 'ave me
on the mat again and talk all that stuff
to me. No, if someone 'as to suffer . . .
'Ere she is. . . .

[Noise of approaching train heard.]

BERT: Ay, that's her.

BILL: And shut goes the door.

[Enter JOHN BEAL.]

BERT: Wait a moment, Bill.

BILL: Not if he's . . . Not if he was *ever* so.

JOHN (*preparing to pass*): Good morning. . . .

BILL: Can't come through. Too late.

JOHN: Too late? Why, the train's only just in.

BILL: Don't care. It's the rule.

JOHN: O, nonsense. (*He carries on.*)

BILL: It's too late. I tell you you can't come.

JOHN: But that's absurd. I want to catch my train.

BILL: It's too late.

BERT: Let him go, Bill.

BILL: I'm blowed if I let him go.

JOHN: I want to catch my train.

[JOHN is stopped by BILL and pushed back by the face. JOHN advances towards BILL looking like fighting. The train has gone.]

BILL: Only doing my duty.

[JOHN stops and reflects at this, deciding it isn't good enough. He shrugs his shoulders, turns round and goes away.]

JOHN: I shouldn't be surprised if I didn't get even with you one of these days, you . . . and some way you won't expect.

CURTAIN.

ACT I. SCENE II

Yesterday evening.

Curtain rises on JOHN and MARY in their suburban home.

JOHN : I say, dear. Don't you think we ought to plant an acacia ?

MARY : An acacia, what's that, John ?

JOHN : O, it's one of those trees that they have.

MARY : But why, John ?

JOHN : Well, you see the house is called The Acacias, and it seems rather silly not to have at least one.

MARY : O, I don't think that matters. Lots of places are called lots of things. Everyone does.

JOHN : Yes, but it might help the postman.

MARY : O, no, it wouldn't, dear. He wouldn't know an acacia if he saw it any more than I should.

JOHN : Quite right, Mary, you're always right. What a clever head you've got !

MARY : Have I, John ? We'll plant an acacia if you like. I'll ask about it at the grocer's.

JOHN : You can't get one there.

MARY : No, but he's sure to know where it can be got.

JOHN : Where do they grow, Mary ?

MARY : I don't know, John ; but I am sure they do, somewhere.

JOHN : Somehow I wish sometimes, I almost wish I could have gone abroad for a week or so to places like where acacias grow naturally.

MARY : O, would you really, John ?

JOHN : No, not really. But I just think of it sometimes.

MARY : Where would you have gone ?

JOHN : O, I don't know. The East or some such place. I've often heard people speak of it, and somehow it seemed so . . .

MARY : The East, John ? Not the East. I don't think the East somehow is quite respectable.

JOHN : O well, it's all right, I never went, and never shall go now. It doesn't matter.

MARY (*the photographs catching her eye*) : O, John, I meant to tell you. Such a dreadful thing happened.

JOHN : What, Mary ?

MARY : Well, Liza was dusting the photographs, and when she came to Jane's she says she hadn't really begun to dust it, only

looked at it, and it fell down, and that bit of glass is broken right out of it.

JOHN: Ask her not to look at it so hard another time.

MARY: O, what do you mean, John?

JOHN: Well, that's how she broke it; she said so, and as I know you believe in Liza . . .

MARY: Well, I can't think she'd tell a lie, John.

JOHN: No, of course not. But she mustn't look so hard another time.

MARY: And it's poor little Jane's photograph. She will feel it so.

JOHN: O, that's all right, we'll get it mended.

MARY: Still, it's a dreadful thing to have happened.

JOHN: We'll get it mended, and if Jane is unhappy about it she can have Alice's frame. Alice is too young to notice it.

MARY: She isn't, John. She'd notice it quick.

JOHN: Well, George, then.

MARY (*looking at photo thoughtfully*): Well, perhaps George might give up his frame.

JOHN: Yes, tell Liza to change it. Why not make her do it now?

MARY: Not to-day, John. Not on a Sunday. She shall do it to-morrow by the time you get back from the office.

JOHN: All right. It might have been worse.

MARY: It's bad enough. I wish it hadn't happened.

JOHN: It might have been worse. It might have been Aunt Martha.

MARY: I'd sooner it had been her than poor little Jane.

JOHN: If it had been Aunt Martha's photograph she'd have walked in next day and seen it for certain; I know Aunt Martha. Then there'd have been trouble.

MARY: But, John, how could she have known?

JOHN: I don't know, but she would have; it's a kind of devilish sense she has.

MARY: John!

JOHN: What's the matter?

MARY: John! What a dreadful word you used. And on a Sunday too! Really!

JOHN: O, I'm sorry. It slipped out somehow. I'm very sorry.

[Enter LIZA.]

LIZA: There's a gentleman to see you, sir, which isn't, properly speaking, a gentleman at all. Not what I should call one, that is, like.

MARY: Not a gentleman! Good gracious, Liza! Whatever do you mean?

LIZA: He's black.

MARY: Black?

JOHN (*reassuring*): O . . . yes, that would be Ali. A queer old customer, Mary; perfectly harmless. Our firm gets hundreds of carpets through him; and then one day . . .

MARY: But what is he doing here, John?

JOHN: Well, one day he turned up in London; broke, he said; and wanted the firm to give him a little cash. Well, old Briggs was for giving him ten shillings. But I said, "here's a man that's helped us in making thousands of pounds. Let's give him fifty."

MARY: Fifty pounds!

JOHN: Yes, it seems a lot; but it seemed only fair. Ten shillings would have been an insult to the old fellow, and he'd have taken it as such. You don't know what he'd have done.

MARY: Well, he doesn't want more?

JOHN: No, I expect he's come to thank me. He seemed pretty keen on getting some cash. Badly broke, you see. Don't know what he was doing in London. Never can tell with these fellows. East is East, and there's an end of it.

MARY: How did he trace you here?

JOHN: O, got the address at the office. Briggs and Cater won't let theirs be known.

Not got such a smart little house, I expect.

MARY : I don't like letting people in that you don't know where they come from.

JOHN : O, he comes from the East.

MARY : Yes, I—I know. But the East doesn't seem quite to count, somehow, as the proper sort of place to come from, does it, dear ?

JOHN : No.

MARY : It's not like Sydenham or Bromley, some place you can put your finger on.

JOHN : Perhaps just for once, I don't think there's any harm in him.

MARY : Well, just for once. But we can't make a practice of it. And you don't want to be thinking of business on a Sunday, your only day off.

JOHN : O, it isn't business, you know. He only wants to say thank you.

MARY : I hope he won't say it in some queer Eastern way. You don't know what these people . . .

JOHN : O, no. Show him up, Liza.

LIZA : As you like, mum.

[Exit.]

MARY : And you gave him fifty pounds ?

JOHN : Well, old Briggs agreed to it. So I suppose that's what he got. Cater paid him.

MARY: It seems a lot of money. But I think, as the man is actually coming up the stairs, I'm glad he's got something to be grateful for.

[Enter ALI, shown in by LIZA.]

ALI: Protector of the Just.

JOHN: O, er—yes. Good evening.

ALI: My soul was parched and you bathed it in rivers of gold.

JOHN: O, ah, yes.

ALI: Wherefore the name of Briggs, Cater, and Beal shall be magnified and called blessed.

JOHN: Ha, yes. Very good of you.

ALI (*advancing, handing trinket*): Protector of the Just, my offering.

JOHN: Your offering?

ALI: Hush. It is beyond price. I am not bidden to sell it. I was in my extremity, but I was not bidden to sell it. It is a token of gratitude, a gift, as it came to me.

JOHN: As it came to you?

ALI: Yes, it was given me.

JOHN: I see. Then you had given somebody what you call rivers of gold?

ALI: Not gold; it was in Sahara.

JOHN: O, and what do you give in the Sahara instead of gold?

ALI: Water.

JOHN: I see. You got it for a glass of water, like.

ALI: Even so.

JOHN: And—and what happened?

MARY: I wouldn't take his only crystal, dear.
It's a nice little thing, but (*to ALI*)
but you think a lot of it, don't you?

ALI: Even so.

JOHN: But look here, what does it do?

ALI: Much.

JOHN: Well, what?

ALI: He that taketh this crystal, so, in his hand, at night, and wishes, saying "At a certain hour let it be"; the hour comes and he will go back eight, ten, even twelve years if he will, into the past, and do a thing again, or act otherwise than he did. The day passes; the ten years are accomplished once again; he is here once more; but he is what he might have become had he done that one thing otherwise.

MARY: John!

JOHN: I—I don't understand.

ALI: To-night you wish. All to-morrow you live the last ten years; a new way, master, a new way, how you please.

To-morrow night you are here, what those years have made you.

JOHN: By Jove!

MARY: Have nothing to do with it, John.

JOHN: All right, Mary, I'm not going to. But, do you mean one could go back ten years?

ALI: Even so.

JOHN: Well, it seems odd, but I'll take your word for it. But look here, you can't live ten years in a day, you know.

ALI: My master has power over time.

MARY: John, don't have anything to do with him.

JOHN: All right, Mary. But who is your master?

ALI: He is carved of one piece of jade, a god in the greenest mountains. The years are his dreams. This crystal is his treasure. Guard it safely, for his power is in this more than in all the peaks of his native hills. See what I give you, master.

JOHN: Well, really, it's very good of you.

MARY: Good night, Mr. Ali. We are very much obliged for your kind offer, which we are so sorry we can't avail ourselves of.

JOHN: One moment, Mary. Do you mean that I can go back ten years, and live till—till now again, and only be away a day?

ALI: Start early, and you will be here before midnight.

JOHN: Would eight o'clock do !

ALI: You could be back by eleven that evening.

JOHN: I don't quite see how ten years could go in a single day.

ALI: They will go as dreams go.

JOHN: Even so, it seems rather unusual, doesn't it ?

ALI: Time is the slave of my master.

MARY: John !

JOHN: All right, Mary. (*In a lower voice.*) I'm only trying to see what he'll say.

MARY: All right, John, only . . .

ALI: Is there no step that you would wish un-trodden, nor stride that you would make where once you faltered ?

JOHN: I say, why don't you use it yourself ?

ALI: I ? I am afraid of the past. But you Engleesh, and the great firm of Briggs, Cater, and Beal ; you are afraid of nothing.

JOHN: Ha, ha. Well—I wouldn't go quite as far as that, but—well, give me the crystal.

MARY: Don't take it, John ! Don't take it.

JOHN: Why, Mary ? It won't hurt me.

MARY: If it can do all that—if it can do all that . . .

JOHN: Well?

MARY: Why, you might never have met me.

JOHN: Never have met you? I never thought of that.

MARY: Leave the past alone, John.

JOHN: All right, Mary. I needn't use it. But I want to hear about it, it's so odd, it's so what-you-might-call queer; I don't think I ever— (*To Ali.*) You mean if I work hard for ten years, which will only be all to-morrow, I may be Governor of the Bank of England to-morrow night.

ALI: Even so.

MARY: O, don't do it, John.

JOHN: But you said—I'll be back here before midnight to-morrow.

ALI: It is so.

JOHN: But the Governor of the Bank of England would live in the City, and he'd have a much bigger house anyway. He wouldn't live in Lewisham.

ALI: The crystal will bring you to this house when the hour is accomplished, even to-morrow night. If you be the great banker, you will perhaps come to chastise one of your slaves who will dwell in this house. If you be head of Briggs and Cater you will come to give an edict to one of your firm.

Perchance this street will be yours
and you will come to show your
power unto it. *But you will come.*

JOHN: And if the house is not mine?

MARY: John! John! Don't.

ALI: *Still* you will come.

JOHN: Shall I remember?

ALI: No.

JOHN: If I want to do anything different to what
I did, how shall I remember when I
get back there?

MARY: Don't. Don't do anything different,
John.

JOHN: All right.

ALI: Choose just before the hour of the step
you desire to change. Memory lingers
a little at first, and fades away slowly.

JOHN: Five minutes?

ALI: Even ten.

JOHN: Then I can change one thing. After that
I forget.

ALI: Even so. One thing. And the rest
follows.

JOHN: Well, it's very good of you to make me
this nice present, I'm sure.

ALI: Sell it not. Give it, as I gave it, if the
heart impels. So shall it come back
one day to the hills that are brighter
than grass, made richer by the

gratitude of many men. And my master shall smile thereat and the vale shall be glad.

JOHN : It's very good of you, I'm sure.

MARY : I don't like it, John. I don't like tampering with what's gone.

ALI : My master's power is in your hands. Farewell.

[Exit.]

JOHN : I say, he's gone.

MARY : O, he's a dreadful man.

JOHN : I never really meant to take it.

MARY : O, John, I wish you hadn't.

JOHN : Why ? I'm not going to use it.

MARY : Not going to use it, John ?

JOHN : No, no. Not if you don't want me to.

MARY : O, I'm so glad.

JOHN : And besides, I don't want things different.

I've got fond of this little house. And Briggs is a good old sort, you know. Cater's a bit of an ass, but there's no harm in him. In fact, I'm contented, Mary. I wouldn't even change Aunt Martha now.

[*Points at frowning framed photograph centrally hung.*

You remember when she first came and you said "where shall we hang her ?" I said the cellar. You said

we couldn't. So she had to go there. But I wouldn't change her now. I suppose there are old watch-dogs like her in every family. I wouldn't change anything.

MARY: O, John, wouldn't you really?

JOHN: No, I'm contented. Grim old soul, I wouldn't even change Aunt Martha.

MARY: I'm glad of that, John. I was frightened. I couldn't bear to tamper with the past. You don't know what it is it's what's gone. But if it really isn't gone at all, if it can be dug up like that, why you don't know what mightn't happen! I don't mind the future, but if the past can come back like that . . . O, don't, don't, John. Don't think of it. It isn't canny. There's the children, John.

JOHN: Yes, yes, that's all right. It's only a little ornament. I won't use it. And I tell you I'm content. (*happily*) It's no use to me.

MARY: I'm so glad you're content, John. Are you really? Is there nothing that you'd have had different? I sometimes thought you'd rather that Jane had been a boy.

JOHN: Not a bit of it. Well, I may have at the time, but Arthur's good enough for me.

MARY: I'm so glad. And there's nothing you ever regret at all?

JOHN: Nothing. And you? Is there nothing you regret, Mary?

MARY: Me? Oh, no. I still think that sofa would have been better green, but you would have it red.

JOHN: Yes, so I would. No, there's nothing I regret.

MARY: I don't suppose there's many men can say that.

JOHN: No, I don't suppose they can. They're not all married to you. I don't suppose many of them can.

[MARY smiles.]

MARY: I should think that very few could say that they regretted nothing . . . very few in the whole world.

JOHN: Well, I won't say nothing.

MARY: What is it you regret, John?

JOHN: Well, there is one thing.

MARY: And what is that?

JOHN: One thing has rankled a bit.

MARY: Yes, John?

JOHN: O, it's nothing, it's nothing worth mentioning. But it rankled for years.

MARY: What was it, John?

JOHN: O, it seems silly to mention it. It was nothing.

MARY : But what ?

JOHN : O, well, if you want to know, it was once when I missed a train. I don't mind missing a train, but it was the way the porter pushed me out of the way. He pushed me by the face. I couldn't hit back, because, well, you know what lawyers make of it ; I might have been ruined. So it just rankled. It was years ago, before we married.

MARY : Pushed you by the face. Good gracious !

JOHN : Yes, I'd like to have caught that train in spite of him. I sometimes think of it still. Silly of me, isn't it ?

MARY : What a brute of a man.

JOHN : O, I suppose he was doing his silly duty. But it rankled.

MARY : He'd no right to do any such thing !
He'd no right to touch you !

JOHN : O, well, never mind.

MARY : I should like to have been there. . . . I'd have . . .

JOHN : O, well, it can't be helped now ; but I'd like to have caught it in sp . . .

[An idea seizes him.]

MARY : What is it ?

JOHN : Can't be helped, I said. *It's the very thing that can be helped.*

MARY : Can be helped, John ? Whatever do you mean ?

JOHN: I mean he'd no right to stop me catching that train. I've got the crystal, and I'll catch it yet!

MARY: O, John, that's what you said you wouldn't do.

JOHN: No. I said I'd do nothing to alter the past. And I won't. I'm too content, Mary. But this can't alter it. This is nothing.

MARY: What were you going to catch the train for, John.

JOHN: For London. I wasn't at the office then. It was a business appointment. There was a man who had promised to get me a job, and I was going up to . . .

MARY: John, it may alter your whole life!

JOHN: Now do listen, Mary, do listen. He never turned up. I got a letter from him apologising to me before I posted mine to him. It turned out he never meant to help me, mere meaningless affabilities. He never came to London that day at all. I should have taken the next train back. That can't affect the future.

MARY: N-no, John. Still, I don't like it.

JOHN: What difference could it make?

MARY: N-n-no.

JOHN: Think how we met. We met at Archie's wedding. I take it one has to go to

one's brother's wedding. It would take a pretty big change to alter that. And you were her bridesmaid. We were bound to meet. And having once met, well, there you are. If we'd met by chance, in a train, or anything like that, well, then I admit some little change might alter it. But when we met at Archie's wedding and you were her bridesmaid, why, Mary, it's a cert. Besides, I believe in predestination. It was our fate; we couldn't have missed it.

MARY: No, I suppose not; still . . .

JOHN: Well, what?

MARY: I don't like it.

JOHN: O, Mary, I have so longed to catch that infernal train. Just think of it, annoyed on and off for ten years by the eight-fifteen.

MARY: I'd rather you didn't, John.

JOHN: But why?

MARY: O, John, suppose there's a railway accident? You might be killed, and we should never meet.

JOHN: There wasn't.

MARY: There wasn't, John? What do you mean?

JOHN: There wasn't an accident to the eight-fifteen. It got safely to London just ten years ago.

MARY: Why, nor there was.

JOHN: You see how groundless your fears are. I shall catch that train, and all the rest will happen the same as before. Just think, Mary, all those old days again. I wish I could take you with me. But you soon will be. But just think of the old days coming back again. Hampton Court again and Kew, and Richmond Park again with all the May. And that bun you bought, and the corked ginger-beer, and those birds singing and the 'bus past Isleworth. O, Mary, you wouldn't grudge me that?

MARY: Well, well then all right, John.

JOHN: And you will remember there wasn't an accident, won't you?

MARY (*resignedly, sadly*): O, yes, John. And you won't try to get rich or do anything silly, will you?

JOHN: No, Mary. I only want to catch that train. I'm content with the rest. The same things must happen, and they must lead me the same way, to you, Mary. Good night, now, dear.

MARY: Good night?

JOHN: I shall stay here on the sofa holding the crystal and thinking. Then I'll have a biscuit and start at seven.

MARY: Thinking, John? What about?

JOHN : Getting it clear in my mind what I want to do. That one thing and the rest the same. There must be no mistakes.

MARY (*sadly*) : Good night, John.

JOHN : Have supper ready at eleven.

MARY : Very well, John.

[*Exit.*]

JOHN (*on the sofa, after a moment or two*) : I'll catch that infernal train in spite of him.

[*He takes the crystal and closes it up in the palm of his left hand.*

I wish to go back ten years, two weeks and a day, at, at—8.10 a.m. to-morrow ; 8.10 a.m. to-morrow, 8.10.

[*Re-enter MARY in doorway.*

MARY : John ! John ! You are sure he *did* get his fifty pounds ?

JOHN : Yes. Didn't he come to thank me for the money ?

MARY : You are sure it wasn't ten shillings ?

JOHN : Well, Cater paid him, I didn't.

MARY : Are you sure that Cater didn't give him ten shillings ?

JOHN : It's the sort of silly thing Cater *would* have done !

MARY : O, John !

JOHN : H'mm.

CURTAIN.

ACT I. SCENE III

Scene : As in Act I, Scene I.

Time : Ten years ago.

BERT : 'Ow goes it, Bill ?

BILL : Goes it ? 'Ow d'yer think it goes ?

BERT : I don't know, Bill. 'Ow is it ?

BILL : Bloody.

BERT : Why, what's wrong ?

BILL : Wrong ? Nothing ain't wrong.

BERT : What's up, then ?

BILL : Nothing ain't right.

BERT : Why, wot's the worry ?

BILL : Wot's the worry ? They don't give you better wages nor a dog, and then they thinks they can talk at yer and talk at yer, and say wot they likes, like.

BERT : Why ? You been on the carpet, Bill ?

BILL : Ain't I ! Proper.

BERT : Why ? Wot about, Bill ?

BILL : Wot about ? I'll tell yer. Just coz I let a lidy get into a train. That's wot about. Said I ought to 'av stopped 'er. Thought the train was moving.

Thought it was dangerous. Thought
I tried to murder 'er, I suppose.

BERT: Wot? The other day?

BILL: Yes.

BERT: Tuesday?

BILL: Yes.

BERT: Why? The one that dropped her bag?

BILL: Yes. Drops 'er bag. Writes to the company. They writes back she shouldn't 'av got in. She writes back she should. Then they gets on to me. Any more of it and I'll . . .

BERT: I wouldn't, Bill; don't you.

BILL: I will.

BERT: Don't you, Bill. You've got your family to consider.

BILL: Well, anyway, I won't let any more of them passengers go jumping into trains any more, not when they're moving, I won't. When the train gets in, doors shut. That's the rule, and they'll have to abide by it.

[Enter JOHN BEAL.]

BILL (touching his hat): Good morning, sir.

[JOHN does not answer, but walks to the door between them.]

Carry your bag, sir?

JOHN: Go to hell!

[Exit through door.]

BILL: 'Ullo.

BERT: Somebody's been getting at 'im.

BILL: Well, I never did. Why, I knows the young feller.

BERT: Pleasant spoken, ain't 'e, as a rule?

BILL: Never knew 'im like this.

BERT: You ain't bin sayin' nothing to 'im, 'ave yer?

BILL: Never in my life.

BERT: Well, I never.

BILL: 'Ad some trouble o' some kind.

BERT: Must 'ave.

[*Train is heard.*

BILL: Ah, 'ere she is. Well, as I was saying . . .

CURTAIN.

ACT I. SCENE IV

In a second-class railway carriage.

Time : Same morning as Scene I, Act I.

Noise, and a scene drawn past the windows. The scene, showing a momentary glimpse of fair English hills, is almost entirely placards, "GIVE HER BOVRIL," "GIVE HER OXO," alternately, for ever.

Occupants, JOHN BEAL, a girl, a man.

All sit in stoical silence like the two images near Luxor. The man has the window seat, and therefore the right of control over the window.

MIRALDA CLEMENT : *Would you mind having the window open ?*

THE MAN IN THE CORNER (*shrugging his shoulders in a shivery way*) : Er—certainly (*meaning he does not mind. He opens the window*).

MIRALDA CLEMENT : Thank you so much.

MAN IN THE CORNER : Not at all. (*He does not mean to contradict her. Stoical silence again.*)

MIRALDA CLEMENT : Would you mind having it shut now ? I think it is rather cold.

MAN IN THE CORNER: Certainly.

[*He shuts it. Silence again.*

MIRALDA CLEMENT: I think I'd like the window open again now for a bit. It is rather stuffy, isn't it?

MAN IN THE CORNER: Well, I think it's very cold.

MIRALDA CLEMENT: O, do you? But would you mind opening it for me?

MAN IN THE CORNER: I'd much rather it was shut, if you don't mind.

[*She sighs, moves her hands slightly and her pretty face expresses the resignation of the Christian martyr in the presence of lions. This for the benefit of John.*

JOHN: Allow me, madam.

[*He leans across the window's rightful owner, a bigger man than he, and opens his window.*

[**MAN IN THE CORNER** shrugs his shoulders and, quite sensibly, turns to his paper.

MIRALDA: O, thank you so much.

JOHN: Don't mention it.

[*Silence again.*

VOICES OF PORTERS (off): Fan Kar, Fan Kar.

[**MAN IN THE CORNER** gets out.

MIRALDA: Could you tell me where this is?

JOHN: Yes. Elephant and Castle.

MIRALDA : Thank you so much. It *was* kind of you to protect me from that horrid man. He wanted to suffocate me.

JOHN : O, very glad to assist you, I'm sure. Very glad.

MIRALDA : I should have been afraid to have done it in spite of him. It was splendid of you.

JOHN : O, that was nothing.

MIRALDA : O, it was, really.

JOHN : Only too glad to help you in any little way.

MIRALDA : It *was* so kind of you.

JOHN : O, not at all.

[*Silence for a bit.*]

MIRALDA : I've nobody to help me.

JOHN : Er, er, haven't you really ?

MIRALDA : No, nobody.

JOHN : I'd be very glad to help you in any little way.

MIRALDA : I wonder if you could advise me.

JOHN : I—I'd do my best.

MIRALDA : You see, I have nobody to advise me.

JOHN : No, of course not.

MIRALDA : I live with my aunt, and she doesn't understand. I've no father or mother.

JOHN : O, er, er, really ?

MIRALDA : No. And an uncle died and he left me a hundred thousand pounds.

JOHN: Really?

MIRALDA: Yes. He didn't like me. I think he did it out of contrariness as much as anything. He was always like that to me.

JOHN: Was he? Was he really?

MIRALDA: Yes. It was invested at twenty-five per cent. He never liked me. Thought I was too—I don't know what.

JOHN: No.

MIRALDA: That was five years ago, and I've never got a penny of it.

JOHN: Really. But, but that's not right.

MIRALDA (*sadly*): No.

JOHN: Where's it invested?

MIRALDA: In Al Shaldomir.

JOHN: Where's that?

MIRALDA: I don't quite know. I never was good at geography. I never quite knew where Persia ends.

JOHN: And what kind of an investment was it?

MIRALDA: There's a pass in some mountains that they can get camels over, and a huge toll is levied on everything that goes by; that is the custom of the tribe that lives there, and I believe the toll is regularly collected.

JOHN: And who gets it?

MIRALDA : The chief of the tribe. He is called Ben Hussein. But my uncle lent him all this money, and the toll on the camels was what they call the security. They always carry gold and turquoise, you know.

JOHN : Do they ?

MIRALDA : Yes, they get it from the rivers.

JOHN : I see.

MIRALDA : It does seem a shame his not paying, doesn't it ?

JOHN : A shame ? I should think it is. An awful shame. Why, it's a crying shame. He ought to go to prison.

MIRALDA : Yes, he ought. But you see it's so hard to find him. It isn't as if it was this side of Persia. It's being on the other side that is such a pity. If only it was in a country like, like . . .

JOHN : I'd soon find him. I'd . . . Why, a man like that deserves anything.

MIRALDA : It is good of you to say that.

JOHN : Why, I'd . . . And you say you never got a penny ?

MIRALDA : No.

JOHN : Well, that is a shame. I call that a down-right shame.

MIRALDA : Now, what ought I to do ?

JOHN : Do ? Well, now, you know in business

there's nothing like being on the spot.
When you're on the spot you can—but
then, of course, it's so far.

MIRALDA: It is, isn't it?

JOHN: Still, I think you should go if you could.
If only I could offer to help you in any
way, I would gladly, but of course . . .

MIRALDA: What would you do?

JOHN: I'd go and find that Hussein fellow; and
then . . .

MIRALDA: Yes?

JOHN: Why, I'd tell him a bit about the law,
and make him see that you didn't keep
all that money that belonged to some-
one else.

MIRALDA: Would you really?

JOHN: Nothing would please me better.

MIRALDA: Would you really? Would you go all
that way?

JOHN: It's just the sort of thing that I should
like, apart from the crying shame. The
man ought to be . . .

MIRALDA: We're getting into Holborn. Would
you come and lunch somewhere with
me and talk it over?

JOHN: Gladly. I'd be glad to help. I've got
to see a man on business first. I've
come up to see him. And then after
that, after that, there was something

I wanted to do after that. I can't think what it was. But something I wanted to do after that. O, heavens, what was it ?

[*Pause.*]

MIRALDA : Can't you think ?

JOHN : No. O, well, it can't have been so very important. And yet . . . Well, where shall we lunch ?

MIRALDA : Gratzenheim's.

JOHN : Right. What time ?

MIRALDA : One-thirty. Would that suit ?

JOHN : Perfectly. I'd like to get a man like Hussein in prison. I'd like . . . O, I beg your pardon.

[*He hurries to open the door. Exit MIRALDA.*

Now what was it I wanted to do afterwards ?

[*Throws hand to forehead.*

O, never mind.

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

Scene : JOHN's tent in Al Shaldomir. There are two heaps of idols, left and right, lying upon the ground inside the tent. DAOUD carries another idol in his arms.

JOHN looks at its face.

Six months have elapsed since the scene in the second-class railway carriage.

JOHN BEAL : This god is holy.

[He points to the left heap. DAOUD carries it there and lays it on the heap.

DAOUD : Yes, great master.

JOHN BEAL : You are in no wise to call me great master. Have not I said so ? I am not your master. I am helping you people. I know better than you what you ought to do, because I am English. But that's all. I'm not your master. See ?

DAOUD : Yes, great master.

JOHN BEAL : O, go and get some more idols. Hurry.

DAOUD : Great master, I go.

[Exit.

JOHN BEAL: I can't make these people out.

DAOUD (*returning*): I have three gods.

JHN BEAL (*looking at their faces, pointing to the two smaller idols first*): These two are holy. This one is unholy.

DAOUD: Yes, great master.

JOHN BEAL: Put them on the heap.

[DAOUD does so, two left, one right.
Get some more.

[DAOUD salaams. Exit.
(*Looking at right heap.*) What a—
what a filthy people.

[Enter DAOUD with two idols.

JOHN BEAL (*after scrutiny*): This god is holy,
this is unholy.

[Enter ARCHIE BEAL, wearing a
“Bowler” hat.

Why, Archie, this is splendid of you!
You've come! Why, that's splendid!
All that way!

ARCHIE BEAL: Yes, I've come. Whatever are you
doing?

JOHN BEAL: Archie, it's grand of you to come!
I never ought to have asked it of you,
only . . .

ARCHIE BEAL: O, that's all right. But what in
the world are you doing?

JOHN BEAL: Archie, it's splendid of you.

ARCHIE BEAL: O, cut it. That's all right. But what's all this?

JOHN BEAL: O, this. Well, well, they're the very oddest people here. It's a long story. But I wanted to tell you first how enormously grateful I am to you for coming.

ARCHIE BEAL: O, that's all right. But I want to know what you're doing with all these genuine antiques.

JOHN BEAL: Well, Archie, the fact of it is they're a real odd lot of people here. I've learnt their language, more or less, but I don't think I quite understand them yet. A lot of them are Mahomedans; they worship Mahomed, you know. He's dead. But a lot of them worship these things, and . . .

ARCHIE BEAL: Well, what have you got 'em all in here for?

JOHN BEAL: Yes, that's just it. I hate interfering with them, but, well, I simply had to. You see there's two sorts of idols here; they offer fruit and rats to some of them; they lay them on their hands or their laps.

ARCHIE BEAL: Why do they offer them rats?

JOHN BEAL: O, I don't know. They don't know either. It's the right thing to do out here, it's been the right thing for

hundreds of years; nobody exactly knows why. It's like the bows we have on evening shoes, or anything else. But it's all right.

ARCHIE BEAL: Well, what are you putting them in heaps for?

JOHN BEAL: Because there's the other kind, the ones with wide mouths and rust round them.

ARCHIE BEAL: Rust? Yes, so there is. What do they do?

JOHN BEAL: They offer blood to them, Archie. They pour it down their throats. Sometimes they kill people, sometimes they only bleed them. It depends how much blood the idol wants.

ARCHIE BEAL: How much blood it wants? Good Lord! How do they know?

JOHN BEAL: The priests tell them. Sometimes they fill them up to their necks—they're all hollow, you know. In spring it's awful.

ARCHIE BEAL: Why are they worse in spring?

JOHN BEAL: I don't know. The priests ask for more blood then. Much more. They say it always was so.

ARCHIE BEAL: And you're stopping it?

JOHN BEAL: Yes, I'm stopping these. One must. I'm letting them worship those. Of course, it's idolatry and all that kind

of thing, but I don't like interfering short of actual murder.

ARCHIE BEAL: And they're obeying you?

JOHN BEAL: 'M, y-yes. I think so.

ARCHIE BEAL: You must have got a great hold over them.

JOHN BEAL: Well, I don't know about that. It's the pass that counts.

ARCHIE BEAL: The pass?

JOHN BEAL: Yes, that place you came over. It's the only way anyone can get here.

ARCHIE BEAL: Yes, I suppose it is. But how does the pass affect these idols?

JOHN BEAL: It affects everything here. If that pass were closed no living man would ever enter or leave, or even hear of, this country. It's absolutely cut off except for that one pass. Why, Archie, it isn't even on the map.

ARCHIE BEAL: Yes, I know.

JOHN BEAL: Well, whoever owns that pass is everybody. No one else counts.

ARCHIE BEAL: And who does own it?

JOHN BEAL: Well, it's actually owned by a fellow called Hussein, but Miss Clement's uncle, a man called Hinnard, a kind of lonely explorer, seems to have come this way; and I think he understood what this pass is worth. Anyhow, he

lent Hussein a big sum of money and got an acknowledgment from Hussein. Old Hinnard must have been a wonderfully shrewd man. For that acknowledgment is no more legal than an I.O.U., and Hussein is simply a brigand.

ARCHIE BEAL: Not very good security.

JOHN BEAL: Well, you're wrong there. Hussein himself respects that piece of parchment he signed. There's the name of some god or other written on it that Hussein is frightened of. Now you see how things are. That pass is as holy as all the gods that there are in Al Shaldomir. Hussein possesses it. But he owes an enormous sum to Miss Miralda Clement, and I am here as her agent; and you've come to help me like a great sportsman.

ARCHIE BEAL: O, never mind that. Well, it all seems pretty simple.

JOHN BEAL: Well, I don't know, Archie. Hussein admits the debt, but . . .

ARCHIE BEAL: But what?

JOHN BEAL: I don't know what he'll do.

ARCHIE BEAL: Wants watching, does he?

JOHN BEAL: Yes. And meanwhile I feel sort of responsible for all these silly people. Somebody's got to look after them. Daoud!

DAOUD (*off*): Great master.

JOHN BEAL: Bring in some more gods.

DAOUD: Yes, great master.

JOHN BEAL: I can't get them to stop calling me absurd titles. They're so infernally Oriental.

[Enter DAOUD.]

ARCHIE BEAL: He's got two big ones this time.

JOHN BEAL (*to ARCHIE*): You see, there is rust about their mouths. (*To DAOUD*): They are both unholy.

[*He points to R. heap, and DAOUD puts them there. To DAOUD.*]

Bring in some more.

DAOUD: Great master, there are no more gods in Al Shaldomir.

JOHN BEAL: It is well.

DAOUD: What orders, great master.

JOHN BEAL: Listen. At night you shall come and take these gods away. These shall be worshipped again in their own place, these you shall cast into the great river, and tell no man where you cast them.

DAOUD: Yes, great master.

JOHN BEAL: You will do this, Daoud?

DAOUD: Even so, great master.

JOHN BEAL: I am sorry to make you do it. You

are sad that you have to do it. Yet it must be done.

DAOUD : Yes, I am sad, great master.

JOHN BEAL : But why are you sad, Daoud ?

DAOUD : Great master, in times you do not know these gods were holy. In times you have not guessed. In old centuries, master, perhaps before the pass. Men have prayed to them, sorrowed before them, given offerings to them. The light of old hearths has shone on them, flames from old battles. The shadow of the mountains has fallen on them, so many times, master, so many times. Dawn and sunset have shone on them, master, like firelight flickering ; dawn and sunset, dawn and sunset, flicker, flicker, flicker, for century after century. They have sat there watching the dawns like old men by the fire. They are so old, master, so old. And some day dawn and sunset will die away and shine on the world no more, and they would have still sat on in the cold. And now they go. . . . They are our history, master, they are our old times. Though they be bad times they are *our* times, master ; and now they go. I am sad, master, when the old gods go.

JOHN BEAL : But they are bad gods, Daoud.

DAOUD : I am sad when the bad gods go.

JOHN BEAL : They must go, Daoud. See, there is no one watching. Take them now.

DAOUD : Even so, great master.

[*He takes up the largest of the gods with rust.*

Come, Aho-oomlah, thou shalt not drink Nideesh.

JOHN BEAL : Was Nideesh to have been sacrificed ?

DAOUD : He was to have been drunk by Aho-oomlah.

JOHN BEAL : Nideesh. Who is he ?

DAOUD : He is my son.

[*Exit with Aho-oomlab.*

[*JOHN BEAL almost gasps.*

ARCHIE BEAL (*who has been looking round the tent*) : What has he been saying ?

JOHN BEAL : They're—they're a strange people. I can't make them out.

ARCHIE BEAL : Is that the heap that oughtn't to be worshipped ?

JOHN BEAL : Yes.

ARCHIE BEAL : Well, do you know, I'm going to chuck this hat there. It doesn't seem to me somehow to be any more right here than those idols would be at home. Odd, isn't it ? Here goes.

[He throws hat on right heap of idols.
JOHN BEAL does not smile.

Why, what's the matter ?

JOHN BEAL : I don't like to see a decent Christian hat among these filthy idols. They've all got rust on their mouths. I don't like to see it, Archie ; it's sort of like what they call an omen. I don't like it.

ARCHIE BEAL : Do they keep malaria here ?

- JOHN BEAL : I don't think so. Why ?

ARCHIE BEAL : Then what's the matter, Johnny ?
Your nerves are bad.

JOHN BEAL : You don't know these people, and I've brought you out here. I feel kind of responsible. If Hussein's lot turn nasty you don't know what he'd do, with all those idols and all.

ARCHIE BEAL : He'll give 'em a drink, you mean ?

JOHN BEAL : Don't, Archie. There's no saying.
And I feel responsible for you.

ARCHIE BEAL : Well, they can have my hat. It looks silly, somehow. I don't know why. What are we going to do ?

JOHN BEAL : Well, now that you've come we can go ahead.

ARCHIE BEAL : Righto. What at ?

JOHN BEAL : We've got to see Hussein's accounts, and get everything clear in black and white, and see just what he owes to Miss Miralda Clement.

ARCHIE BEAL: But they don't keep accounts here.

JOHN BEAL: How do you know?

ARCHIE BEAL: Why, of course they don't. One can see that.

JOHN BEAL: But they must.

ARCHIE BEAL: Well, you haven't changed a bit for your six months here.

JOHN BEAL: Haven't changed?

ARCHIE BEAL: No. Just quietly thinking of business. You'll be a great business man, Johnny.

JOHN BEAL: But we must do business; that's what I came here for.

ARCHIE BEAL: You'll never make these people do it.

JOHN BEAL: Well, what do you suggest?

ARCHIE BEAL: Let's have a look at old Hussein.

JOHN BEAL: Yes, that's what I have been waiting for. Daoud!

DAOUD (*off*): Master.

[Enters.]

JOHN BEAL: Go to the palace of the Lord of the Pass and beat on the outer door. Say that I desire to see him. Pray him to come to my tent.

[DAOUD bows and Exit.]

[To ARCHIE.]

I've sent him to the palace to ask Hussein to come.

ARCHIE BEAL: Lives in a palace, does he?

JOHN BEAL: Yes, it's a palace, it's a wonderful place. It's bigger than the Mansion House, much.

ARCHIE BEAL: And you're going to teach him to keep accounts.

JOHN BEAL: Well, I must. I hate doing it. It seems almost like being rude to the Lord Mayor. But there's two things I can't stand—cheating in business is one and murder's another. I've got to interfere. You see, if one happens to know the right from wrong as we do, we've simply got to tell people who don't. But it isn't pleasant. I almost wish I'd never come.

ARCHIE BEAL: Why, it's the greatest sport in the world. It's splendid.

JOHN BEAL: I don't see it that way. To me those idols are just horrid murder. And this man owes money to this girl with no one to look after her, and he's got to pay. But I hate being rude to a man in a place like the Mansion House, even if he is black. Why, good Lord, who am I? It seems such cheek.

ARCHIE BEAL: I say, Johnny, tell me about the lady. Is she pretty?

JOHN BEAL: What, Miss Miralda? Yes.

ARCHIE BEAL: But what I mean is—what's she like?

JOHN BEAL: Oh, I don't know. It's very hard to say. She's, she's tall and she's fair and she's got blue eyes.

ARCHIE BEAL: Yes, but I mean what kind of a person is she? How does she strike you?

JOHN BEAL: Well, she's pretty hard up until she gets this money, and she hasn't got any job that's any good, and no real prospects bar this, and nobody particular by birth, and doesn't know anybody who is, and lives in the least fashionable suburb and can only just afford a second-class fare and . . .

ARCHIE BEAL: Yes, yes, go on.

JOHN BEAL: And yet somehow she sort of seems like a—like a queen.

ARCHIE BEAL: Lord above us! And what kind of a queen?

JOHN BEAL: O, I don't know. Well, look here, Archie, it's only my impression. I don't know her well yet. It's only my impression. I only tell you in absolute confidence. You won't pass it on to anybody, of course.

ARCHIE BEAL: O, no. Go on.

JOHN BEAL: Well, I don't know, only she seemed more like—well, a kind of autocrat,

you know, who'd stop at nothing.
Well, no, I don't mean that, only . . .

ARCHIE BEAL: So you're not going to marry her?

JOHN BEAL: Marry her! Good Lord, no. Why, you'd never dare ask her. She's not that sort. I tell you she's a sort of queen. And (Good Lord!) she'd *be* a queen if it wasn't for Hussein, or something very like one. We can't go marrying queens. Anyhow, not one like her.

ARCHIE BEAL: Why not one like her?

JOHN BEAL: I tell you—she's a—well, a kind of goddess. You couldn't ask her if she loved you. It would be such, such . . .

ARCHIE BEAL: Such what?

JOHN BEAL: Such infernal cheek.

ARCHIE BEAL: I see. Well, I see you aren't in love with her. But it seems to me you'll be seeing a good deal of her some day if we pull this off. And then, my boy-o, you'll be going and getting in love with her.

JOHN BEAL: I tell you I daren't. I'd as soon propose to the Queen of Sheba.

ARCHIE BEAL: Well, Johnny, I'm going to protect you from her all I can.

JOHN BEAL: Protect me from her? Why?

ARCHIE BEAL: Why, because there's lots of other

girls, and it seems to me you might be happier with some of them.

JOHN BEAL: But you haven't even seen her.

ARCHIE BEAL: Nor I have. Still, if I'm here to protect you I somehow think I will. And if I'm not . . .

JOHN BEAL: Well, and what then?

ARCHIE BEAL: What nonsense I'm talking. Fate does everything. I can't protect you.

JOHN BEAL: Yes, it's nonsense all right, Archie, but . . .

HUSSEIN (*off*): I am here.

JOHN BEAL: Be seen.

[HUSSEIN enters. *He is not unlike Bluebeard.*

JOHN BEAL (*pointing to ARCHIE*): My brother.

[ARCHIE shakes hands with HUSSEIN. HUSSEIN looks at his hand when it is over in a puzzled way. JOHN BEAL and HUSSEIN then bow to each other.

HUSSEIN: You desired my presence.

JOHN BEAL: I am honoured.

HUSSEIN: And I.

JOHN BEAL: The white traveller, whom we call Hinnard, lent you one thousand greater gold pieces, which in our money is one hundred thousand pounds, as you acknowledge. (HUSSEIN

nods his head.) And every year you were to pay him for this two hundred and fifty of your greater gold pieces—as you acknowledge also.

HUSSEIN: Even so.

JOHN BEAL: And this you have not yet had chance to pay, but owe it still.

HUSSEIN: I do.

JOHN BEAL: And now Hinnard is dead.

HUSSEIN: Peace be with him.

JOHN BEAL: His heiress is Miss Miralda Clement, who instructs me to be her agent. What have you to say?

HUSSEIN: Peace be with Hinnard.

JOHN BEAL: You acknowledge your debt to this lady, Miss Miralda Clement?

HUSSEIN: I know her not.

JOHN BEAL: You will not pay your debt?

HUSSEIN: I will pay.

JOHN BEAL: If you bring the gold to my tent, my brother will take it to Miss Clement.

HUSSEIN: I do not pay to Miss Clement.

JOHN BEAL: To whom do you pay?

HUSSEIN: I pay to Hinnard.

JOHN BEAL: Hinnard is dead.

HUSSEIN: I pay to Hinnard.

JOHN BEAL: How will you pay to Hinnard?

HUSSEIN: If he be buried in the sea . . .

JOHN BEAL: He is not buried at sea.

HUSSEIN: If he be buried by any river I go to the god of rivers.

JOHN BEAL: He is buried on land near no river.

HUSSEIN: Therefore I will go to a bronze god of earth, very holy, having the soil in his care, and the things of earth. I will take unto him the greater pieces of gold due up to the year when the white traveller died, and will melt them in fire at his feet by night on the mountains, saying, "O, Lruru-onn (this is his name) take this by the way of earth to the grave of Hinnard." And so I shall be free of my debt before all gods.

JOHN BEAL: But not before me. I am English. And we are greater than gods.

ARCHIE BEAL: What's that, Johnny?

JOHN BEAL: He won't pay, but I told him we're English and that they're greater than all his bronze gods.

ARCHIE BEAL: That's right, Johnny.

[HUSSEIN looks fiercely at ARCHIE. He sees ARCHIE'S hat lying before a big idol. He points at the hat and looks in the face of the idol.

HUSSEIN (*to the idol*): Drink! Drink!

[He bows. Exit.

ARCHIE BEAL: What's that he's saying?

JOHN BEAL (*meditatively*): O, nothing—nothing.

ARCHIE BEAL: He won't pay, eh?

JOHN BEAL: No, not to Miss Miralda.

ARCHIE BEAL: Who to?

JOHN BEAL: To one of his gods.

ARCHIE BEAL: That won't do.

JOHN BEAL: No.

ARCHIE BEAL: What'll we do?

JOHN BEAL: I don't quite know. It isn't as if we were in England.

ARCHIE BEAL: No, it isn't.

JOHN BEAL: If we were in England . . .

ARCHIE BEAL: I know; if we were in England you could call a policeman. I tell you what it is, Johnny.

JOHN BEAL: Yes?

ARCHIE BEAL: I tell you what; you want to see more of Miss Clement.

JOHN BEAL: Why?

ARCHIE BEAL: Why, because at the present moment our friend Hussein is a craftier fellow than you, and looks like getting the best of it.

JOHN BEAL: How will seeing more of Miss Miralda help us?

ARCHIE BEAL: Why, because you want to be a bit craftier than Hussein, and I fancy she might make you.

JOHN BEAL: She? How?

ARCHIE BEAL: We're mostly made what we are by some woman or other. We think it's our own cleverness, but we're wrong. As things are you're no match for Hussein, but if you altered . . .

JOHN BEAL: Why, Archie; where did you get all those ideas from?

ARCHIE BEAL: O, I don't know.

JOHN BEAL: You never used to talk like that.

ARCHIE BEAL: O well.

JOHN BEAL: You haven't been getting in love, Archie, have you?

ARCHIE BEAL: What are we to do about Hussein?

JOHN BEAL: It's funny your mentioning Miss Miralda. I got a letter from her the same day I got yours.

ARCHIE BEAL: What does she say?

JOHN BEAL: I couldn't make it out.

ARCHIE BEAL: What were her words?

JOHN BEAL: She said she was going into it closer. She underlined closer. What could she mean by that? How could she get closer?

ARCHIE BEAL: Well, the same way as I did.

JOHN BEAL: How do you mean? I don't understand.

ARCHIE BEAL: By coming here.

JOHN BEAL: By coming here? But she can't come here.

ARCHIE BEAL: Why not?

JOHN BEAL: Because it's impossible. Absolutely impossible. Why—good Lord—she couldn't come here. Why, she'd want a chaperon and a house and—and—everything. Good Lord, she couldn't come here. It would be—well, it would be impossible—it couldn't be done.

ARCHIE BEAL: O, all right. Then I don't know what she meant.

JOHN BEAL: Archie! You don't really think she'd come here? You don't really think it, do you?

ARCHIE BEAL: Well, it's the sort of thing that that sort of girl might do, but of course I can't say . . .

JOHN BEAL: Good Lord, Archie! That would be awful.

ARCHIE BEAL: But why?

JOHN BEAL: Why? But what would I do? Where would she go? Where would her chaperon go? The chaperon would be some elderly lady. Why, it would kill her.

ARCHIE BEAL: Well, if it did you've never met her, so you needn't go into mourning for an elderly lady that you don't know; not yet, anyway.

JOHN BEAL: No, of course not. You're laughing at me, Archie. But for the moment I took you seriously. Of course, she won't come. One can go into a thing closely without doing it absolutely literally. But, good Lord, wouldn't it be an awful situation if she did.

ARCHIE BEAL: O, I don't know.

JOHN BEAL: All alone with me here? No, impossible. And the country isn't civilised.

ARCHIE BEAL: Women aren't civilised.

JOHN BEAL: Women aren't . . . ? Good Lord, Archie, what an awful remark. What *do* you mean?

ARCHIE BEAL: We're tame, they're wild. We like all the dull things and the quiet things, they like all the romantic things and the dangerous things.

JOHN BEAL: Why, Archie, it's just the other way about.

ARCHIE BEAL: O, yes; we *do* all the romantic things, and all the dangerous things. But why?

JOHN BEAL: Why? Because we like them, I suppose. I can't think of any other reason.

ARCHIE BEAL: I hate danger. Don't you?

JOHN BEAL: Er—well, yes, I suppose I do, really.

ARCHIE BEAL: Of course you do. We all do. It's the women that put us up to it. She's putting you up to this. And the more she puts you up to the more likely is Hussein to get it in his fat neck.

JOHN BEAL: But—but you don't mean you'd hurt Hussein? Not—not badly, I mean.

ARCHIE BEAL: We're under her orders, Johnny. See what she says.

JOHN BEAL: You, you don't really think she'll come here?

ARCHIE BEAL: Of course I do, and the best thing too. It's her show; she ought to come.

JOHN BEAL: But, but you don't understand. She's just a young girl. A girl like Miss Miralda couldn't come out here over the pass and down these mountains, she'd never stand it, and as for the chaperon . . . You've never met Miss Miralda.

ARCHIE BEAL: No, Johnny. But the girl that was able to get you to go from Bromley to this place can look after herself.

JOHN BEAL: I don't see what that's got to do with it. She was in trouble and I had to help her.

ARCHIE BEAL: Yes, and she'll be in trouble all

the way here from Blackheath, and everyone will have to help her.

JOHN BEAL: What beats me is how you can have the very faintest inkling of what she's like without ever having seen her and without my having spoken of her to you for more than a minute.

ARCHIE BEAL: Well, Johnny, you're not a romantic bird, you're not a traveller by nature, barring your one trip to Eastbourne, and it was I that took you there. And contrariwise, as they say in a book you've never read, you're a level-headed business man and a hardworking respectable stay-at-home. You meet a girl in a train, and the next time I see you you're in a place that isn't marked on the map and telling it what gods it ought to worship and what gods it ought to have agnosticism about. Well, I say *some girl*.

JOHN BEAL: Well, I must say you make the most extraordinary deductions, but it was awfully good of you to come, and I ought to be grateful; and I am, too, I'm awfully grateful; and I ought to let you talk all the rot you like. Go ahead. You shall say what you like and do what you like. It isn't many brothers that would do what you've done.

ARCHIE BEAL: O, that's nothing. I like this country. I'm glad I came. And if I can help you with Hussein, why all the better.

JOHN BEAL: It's an awful country, Archie, but we've got to see this through.

ARCHIE BEAL: Does she know all about Hussein?

JOHN BEAL: Yes, everything. I've written fully.

OMAR (*off*):

Al Shaldomir, Al Shaldomir,
The nightingales that guard thy ways . . .

JOHN BEAL (*shouting*): O, go away, go away.

(*To Archie*) I said it was an awful country. They sit down outside one's tent and do that kind of thing for no earthly reason.

ARCHIE BEAL: O, I'd let them sing.

JOHN BEAL: O, you can't have people doing that kind of thing.

OMAR (*in doorway*): Master, I go.

JOHN BEAL: But why do you come?

OMAR: I came to sing a joyous song to you, master.

JOHN BEAL: Why did you want to sing me a joyous song?

OMAR: Because a lady is riding out of the West.

[*Exit.*]

JOHN BEAL: A lady out of . . . Good Lord!

ARCHIE BEAL: She's coming, Johnny.

JOHN BEAL: Coming? Good Lord, no, Archie.

He said a lady; there'd be the chaperon too. There'd be two of them if it was Miss Miralda. But he said a lady. One lady. It can't be her. A girl like that alone in Al Shaldomir. Clean off the map. Oh, no, it isn't possible.

ARCHIE BEAL: I wouldn't worry.

JOHN BEAL: Wouldn't worry? But, good Lord, the situation's impossible. People would talk. Don't you see what people would say? And where could they go? Who would look after them? Do try and understand how awful it is. But it isn't. It's impossible. It can't be them. For heaven's sake run out and see if it is; and (good Lord!) I haven't brushed my hair all day, and, and—oh, look at me.

[*He rushes to camp mirror.*

[*Exit ARCHIE.*

[*JOHN BEAL tidies up desperately.*

[*Enter ARCHIE.*

ARCHIE BEAL: It's what you call *them*.

JOHN BEAL: What I call *them*? Whatever do you mean?

ARCHIE BEAL: Well, it's her. She's just like what you said.

JOHN BEAL: But it can't be. She doesn't ride. She can never have been able to afford a horse.

ARCHIE BEAL: She's on a camel. She'll be here in a moment. (*He goes to door.*) Hurry up with that hair; she's dismounted.

JOHN BEAL: O, Lord! What's the chaperon like?

ARCHIE BEAL: O, she's attending to that herself.

JOHN BEAL: Attending to it herself? What do you mean?

ARCHIE BEAL: I expect she'll attend to most things.

[Enter HAFIZ EL ALCOLAHN in doorway of tent, pulling back flap a little.]

JOHN BEAL: Who are you?

HAFIZ: I show the gracious lady to your tent.

[Enter MIRALDA CLEMENT, throwing a smile to HAFIZ.]

MIRALDA: Hullo, Mr. Beal.

JOHN BEAL: Er—er—how do you do?

[She looks at ARCHIE.]

O, this is my brother—Miss Clement.

MIRALDA
ARCHIE BEAL } How do you do?

MIRALDA: I like this country.

JOHN BEAL: I'm afraid I hardly expected you.

MIRALDA: Didn't you?

JOHN BEAL: No. You see—er—it's such a long way. And wasn't it very expensive?

MIRALDA: Well, the captain of the ship was very kind to me.

JOHN BEAL: O! But what did you do when you landed?

MIRALDA: O, there were some Arabs coming this way in a caravan. They were really very good to me too.

JOHN BEAL: But the camel?

MIRALDA: O, there were some people the other side of the mountains. Everybody has been very kind about it. And then there was the man who showed me here. He's called Hafiz el Alcolahn. It's a nice name, don't you think?

JOHN BEAL: But, you know, this country, Miss Clement, I'm half afraid it's hardly—isn't it, Archie? Er—how long did you think of staying?

MIRALDA: O, a week or so.

JOHN BEAL: I don't know what you'll think of Al Shaldomir. I'm afraid you'll find it . . .

MIRALDA: Oh, I like it. Just that hollow in the mountains, and the one pass, and no record of it anywhere. I like that. I think it's lovely.

JOHN BEAL: You see, I'm afraid—what I mean is I'm afraid the place isn't even on the map!

MIRALDA: O, that's lovely of it.

JOHN BEAL: All decent places are.

MIRALDA: You mean if a place is on the map we've got to behave accordingly. But if not, why . . .

JOHN BEAL: Hussein won't pay.

MIRALDA: Let's see Hussein.

JOHN BEAL: I'm afraid he's rather, he's rather a savage-looking brigand.

MIRALDA: Never mind.

[ARCHIE is quietly listening and smiling sometimes.]

[Enter DAOUD. He goes up to the unholy heap and takes away two large idols, one under each arm. Exit.]

What's that, Mr. Beal?

JOHN BEAL: O, that. I'm afraid it's rather horrible. I told you it was an awful country. They pray to these idols here, and some are all right, though of course it's terribly blasphemous, but *that* heap, well, I'm afraid, well, *that* heap is very bad indeed.

MIRALDA: What do they do?

JOHN BEAL: They kill people.

MIRALDA: Do they? How?

JOHN BEAL: I'm afraid they pour their blood down those horrible throats.

MIRALDA: Do they? How do you know?

JOHN BEAL: I've seen them do it, and those mouths are all rusty. But it's all right now. It won't happen any more.

MIRALDA: Won't it? Why not?

JOHN BEAL: Well, I . . .

ARCHIE BEAL: He's stopped them, Miss Clement. They're all going to be thrown into the river.

MIRALDA: Have you?

JOHN BEAL: Well, yes. I had to. So it's all right now. They won't do it any more.

MIRALDA: H'm.

JOHN BEAL: What, what is it? I promise you that's all right. They won't do that any more.

MIRALDA: H'm. I've never known anyone that tried to govern a country or anything of that sort, but . . .

JOHN BEAL: Of course, I'm just doing what I can to put them right. . . . I'd be very glad of your advice. . . . Of course, I'm only here in your name.

MIRALDA: What I mean is that I'd always thought that the one thing you shouldn't do, if you don't mind my saying so. . .

JOHN BEAL: No, certainly.

MIRALDA: . . . Was to interfere in people's religious beliefs.

JOHN BEAL: But, but I don't think you quite understand. The priests knife these people in the throat, boys and girls, and then acolytes lift them up and the blood runs down. I've seen them.

MIRALDA: I think it's best to leave religion to the priests. They understand that kind of thing.

[JOHN BEAL opens his mouth in horror and looks at ARCHIE. ARCHIE returns the glance; there is very nearly a twinkle in ARCHIE's eyes.

MIRALDA: Let's see Hussein.

JOHN BEAL: What do you think, Archie?

ARCHIE BEAL: Poor fellow. We'd better send for him.

MIRALDA: Why do you say "poor fellow"?

ARCHIE BEAL: Oh, because he's so much in debt. It's awful to be in debt. I'd sooner almost anything happened to me than to owe a lot of money.

MIRALDA: Your remark didn't sound very complimentary.

ARCHIE BEAL: O, I only meant that I'd hate to be in debt. And I should hate owing money to you, because . . .

MIRALDA: Why?

ARCHIE BEAL: Because I should so awfully want to pay it.

MIRALDA: I see.

ARCHIE BEAL: That's all I meant.

MIRALDA: Does Hussein awfully want to pay it?

ARCHIE BEAL: Well, no. But he hasn't seen you yet. He will then, of course.

[Enter DAOUD. *He goes to the unholy heap.*

JOHN BEAL: Daoud, for the present these gods must stay. Aho-oomlah's gone, but the rest must stay for the present.

DAOUD: Even so, great master.

JOHN BEAL: Daoud, go once more to the palace of the Lord of the Pass and beat the outer door. Say that the great lady herself would see him. The great lady, Miss Clement, the white traveller's heiress.

DAOUD: Yes, master.

JOHN BEAL: Hasten.

[*Exit DAOUD.*

I have sent him for Hussein.

MIRALDA: I don't know their language.

JOHN BEAL: You will see him, and I'll tell you what he says.

MIRALDA (*to ARCHIE*): Have you been here long?

ARCHIE BEAL: No. I think he wrote to me by

the same mail as he wrote to you (if they have mails here). I came at once.

MIRALDA: So did I; but you weren't on the *Empress of Switzerland*.

ARCHIE BEAL: No, I came round more by land.

JOHN BEAL: You know, I hardly like bringing Hussein in here to see you. He's such a—he's rather a . . .

MIRALDA: What's the matter with him?

JOHN BEAL: Well, he's rather of the brigand type, and one doesn't know what he'll do.

MIRALDA: Well, we must see him first and hear what he has to say before we take any steps.

JOHN BEAL: But what do you propose to do?

MIRALDA: Why, if he pays me everything he owes, or gives up the security . . .

JOHN BEAL: The security is the pass.

MIRALDA: Yes. If he gives up that or pays . . .

JOHN BEAL: You know he's practically king of the whole country. It seems rather cheek almost my sending for him like this.

MIRALDA: He must come.

JOHN BEAL: But what are you going to do?

MIRALDA: If he gives up the pass . . .

JOHN BEAL: Why, if he gives up the pass you'd be—you'd be a kind of queen of it all.

MIRALDA: Well, if he does that, all right. . . .

JOHN BEAL: But what if he doesn't?

MIRALDA: Why, if he doesn't pay . . .

HUSSEIN (*off*): I am here.

JOHN BEAL: Be seen.

[Enter HUSSEIN.]

HUSSEIN: Greeting once more.

JOHN BEAL: Again greeting. . . . The great lady, Miss Clement, is here.

[HUSSEIN and MIRALDA look at each other.]

You will pay to Miss Clement and not to your god of bronze. On the word of an Englishman, your god of bronze shall not have one gold piece that belongs to the great lady!

HUSSEIN (*looking contemptuous*): On the word of the Lord of the Pass, I only pay to Hinnard.

[He stands smiling while MIRALDA regards him.]

[Exit.]

ARCHIE BEAL: Well?

JOHN BEAL: He won't pay.

ARCHIE BEAL: What are we to do now?

JOHN BEAL (*to MIRALDA*): I'm afraid he's rather an ugly customer to introduce you to like that. I'm sorry he came now.

MIRALDA : O, I like him, I think he looks splendid.

ARCHIE BEAL : Well, what are we to do ?

JOHN BEAL : Yes.

ARCHIE BEAL : What do you say, Miss Clement ?

JOHN BEAL : Yes, what do you feel we ought to do ?

MIRALDA : Well, perhaps I ought to leave all that to you.

ARCHIE BEAL : O, no.

JOHN BEAL : No, it's your money. What do you think we really ought to do ?

MIRALDA : Well, of course, I think you ought to kill Hussein.

[JOHN BEAL and ARCHIE BEAL look at each other a little startled.]

JOHN BEAL : But wouldn't that—wouldn't that be—murder ?

MIRALDA : O, yes, according to the English law.

JOHN BEAL : I see ; you mean—you mean we're not—but we are English.

MIRALDA : I mean it wouldn't be murder—by your law, unless you made it so.

JOHN BEAL : By my law ?

MIRALDA : Yes, if you can interfere with their religion like this, and none of them say a word, why—you can make any laws you like.

JOHN BEAL : But Hussein is king here ; he is

Lord of the Pass, and that's everything here. I'm nobody.

MIRALDA : O, if you like to be nobody, of course that's different.

ARCHIE BEAL : I think she means that if Hussein weren't there there'd be only you. Of course, I don't know. I've only just come.

JOHN BEAL : But we can't kill Hussein !

[MIRALDA begins to cry.

O Lord ! Good heavens ! Please, Miss Clement ! I'm awfully sorry if I've said anything you didn't like. I wouldn't do that for worlds. I'm awfully sorry. It's a beastly country, I know. I'm really sorry you came. I feel it's all my fault. I'm really awfully sorry. . . .

MIRALDA : Never mind. Never mind. I was so helpless, and I asked you to help me. I never ought to have done it. I oughtn't to have spoken to you at all in that train without being introduced ; but I was so helpless. And now, and now, I haven't a penny in the world, and, O, I don't know what to do.

ARCHIE BEAL : We'll do anything for you, Miss Clement.

JOHN BEAL : Anything in the wide world. Please, please don't cry. We'll do anything.

MIRALDA: I . . . I only . . . I only wanted to—to kill Hussein. But never mind, it doesn't matter now.

JOHN BEAL: We'll do it, Miss Clement, won't we, Archie? Only don't cry. We'll do it. I—I suppose he deserves it, doesn't he?

ARCHIE BEAL: Yes, I suppose he does.

JOHN BEAL: Well, all right, Miss Clement, that's settled. My brother and I will talk it over.

MIRALDA (*still sniffing*): And—and—don't hang him or anything—he looks so fine . . . I—I wouldn't like him treated like that. He has such a grand beard. He ought to die fighting.

JOHN BEAL: We'll see what we can do, Miss Clement.

MIRALDA: It is sweet of you. It's really sweet. It's sweet of both of you. I don't know what I'd have done without you. I seemed to know it that day the moment I saw you.

JOHN BEAL: O, it's nothing, Miss Clement, nothing at all.

ARCHIE BEAL: No. That's all right.

MIRALDA: Well, now I'll have to look for an hotel.

JOHN BEAL: Yes, that's the trouble, that really is the trouble. That's what I've been thinking of all the time.

MIRALDA: Why; isn't there . . .

JOHN BEAL: No, I'm afraid there isn't. What are we to do, Archie?

ARCHIE BEAL: I—I can't think. Perhaps Miss Clement would have a scheme.

MIRALDA (*to JOHN BEAL*): I rely on you, Mr. Beal.

JOHN BEAL: I—I; but what can I . . . You see, you're all alone. If you'd anyone with you, you could have . . .

MIRALDA: I did think of bringing a rather nice aunt. But on the whole I thought it better not to tell anyone.

JOHN BEAL: Not to tell . . .

MIRALDA: No, on the whole I didn't.

JOHN BEAL: I say, Archie, what are we to do ?

ARCHIE BEAL: Here's Daoud.

[Enter DAOUD.]

JOHN BEAL: The one man I trust in Al Shaldomir !

DAOUD: I have brought two watchers of the doorstep to guard the noble lady.

JOHN BEAL: He says he's brought two watchers of the doorstep to look after Miss Clement.

ARCHIE BEAL: Two chaperons ! Splendid ! She can go anywhere now.

JOHN BEAL: Well, really, that is better. Yes, that will be all right. We can find

a room for you now. The trouble was your being alone. I hope you'll like them. (*To DAOUD.*) Tell them to enter here.

DAOUD (*beckoning in the doorway*): Ho! Enter!

JOHN BEAL: That's all right, Archie, isn't it?

ARCHIE BEAL: Yes, that's all right. A chaperon's a chaperon, black or white.

JOHN BEAL: You won't mind their being black, will you, Miss Clement?

MIRALDA: No, I shan't mind. They can't be worse than white ones.

[Enter BAZZALOL and THOOOTHOOBABABA, two enormous Nubians, bearing peacock fans and wearing scimitars. All stare at them. They begin to fan slightly.]

DAOUD: The watchers of the doorstep.

JOHN BEAL: Idiot, Daoud! Fools! Dolts! Men may not guard a lady's door.

[BAZZALOL and THOOOTHOOBABABA smile ingratiatingly.]

BAZZALOL (*bowing*): We are not men.

CURTAIN.

Six and a half years elapse.

THE SONG OF THE IRIS MARSHES.

*When morn is bright on the mountains olden
Till dawn is lost in the blaze of day,
When morn is bright and the marshes golden,
Where shall the lost lights fade away ?
And where, my love, shall we dream to-day ?*

*Dawn is fled to the marshy hollows
Where ghosts of stars in the dimness stray,
And the water is streaked with the flash of swallows
And all through summer the iris sway.
But where, my love, shall we dream to-day ?*

When night is black in the iris marshes.

ACT III. SCENE I

Six and a half years later.

Al Shaldomir.

A room in the palace.

MIRALDA reclines on a heap of cushions. JOHN beside her.

Bazzalol and Thoothoobaba fan them.

OMAR (*declaiming to a zither*) :

Al Shaldomir, Al Shaldomir,

The nightingales that guard thy ways
Cease not to give thee, after God
And after Paradise, all praise,
Thou art the theme of all their lays.

Al Shaldomir, Al Shaldomir. . . .

MIRALDA : Go now, Omar.

OMAR : O lady, I depart.

[*Exit.*

MIRALDA (*languidly*) : John, John. I wish you'd marry me.

JOHN : Miralda, you're thinking of those old customs again that we left behind us seven years ago. What's the good of it ?

MIRALDA : I had a fancy that I wished you would.

JOHN: What's the good of it? You know you are my beloved. There are none of those clergymen within hundreds of miles. What's the good of it?

MIRALDA: We could find one, John.

JOHN: O, yes, I suppose we could, but . . .

MIRALDA: Why won't you?

JOHN: I told you why.

MIRALDA: O, yes, that instinct that you must not marry. That's not your reason, John.

JOHN: Yes, it is.

MIRALDA: It's a silly reason. It's a crazy reason. It's no reason at all. There's some other reason.

JOHN: No, there isn't. But I feel that in my bones. I don't know why. You know that I love none else but you. Besides, we're never going back, and it doesn't matter. This isn't Blackheath.

MIRALDA: So I must live as your slave.

JOHN: No, no, Miralda. My dear, you are not my slave. Did not the singer compare our love to the desire of the nightingale for the evening star? All know that you are my queen.

MIRALDA: They do not know at home.

JOHN: Home? Home? How could they know? What have we in common with home?

Rows and rows of little houses ; and if they hear a nightingale there they write to the papers. And—and if they saw this they'd think they were drunk. Miralda, don't be absurd. What has set you thinking of home ?

MIRALDA : I want to be crowned queen.

JOHN : But I am not a king. I am only Shereef.

MIRALDA : You are all-powerful here, John, you can do what you please, if you wish to. You don't love me at all.

JOHN : Miralda, you know I love you. Didn't I kill Hussein for you ?

MIRALDA : Yes, but you don't love me now.

JOHN : And Hussein's people killed Archie. That was for you too. I brought my brother out here to help you. He was engaged to be married, too.

MIRALDA : But you don't love me now.

JOHN : Yes, I do. I love you as the dawn loves the iris marshes. You know the song they sing.*

MIRALDA : Then why won't you marry me ?

JOHN : I told you, I told you. I had a dream about the future. I forgot the dream, but I know I was not to marry. I will not wrong the future.

MIRALDA : Don't be crazy.

* See p. 74.

JOHN : I will have what fancies I please, crazy or sane. Am I not Shereef of Shaldomir ? Who dare stop me if I would be mad as Herod ?

MIRALDA : I will be crowned queen.

JOHN : It is not my wish.

MIRALDA : I will, I will, I will.

JOHN : Drive me not to anger. If I have you cast into a well and take twenty of the fairest daughters of Al Shaldomir in your place, who can gainsay me ?

MIRALDA : I will be crowned queen.

JOHN : O, do not be tiresome.

MIRALDA : Was it not my money that brought you here ? Was it not I who said " Kill Hussein " ? What power could you have had, had Hussein lived ? What would you have been doing now, but for me ?

JOHN : I don't know, Miralda.

MIRALDA : Catching some silly train to the City. Working for some dull firm. Living in some small suburban house. It is I, I, that brought you from all that, and you won't make me a queen.

JOHN : Is it not enough that you are my beloved ? You know there is none other but you. Is it not enough, Miralda ?

MIRALDA : It is not enough. I will be queen.

JOHN : Tchah ! . . . Miralda, I know you are a wonderful woman, the most wonderful in the East ; how you ever came to be in the West I don't know, and a train of all places ; but, Miralda, you must not have petty whims, they don't become you.

MIRALDA : Is it a petty whim to wish to be a queen ?

JOHN : Yes, when it is only the name you want. You *are* a queen. You have all you wish for. Are you not my beloved ? And have I not power here over all men ? Could I not close the pass ?

MIRALDA : I want to be queen.

JOHN : Oh-h ! I will leave you. I have more to do than to sit and hear your whims. When I come back you will have some other whim. Miralda, you have too many whims.

[*He rises.*

MIRALDA : Will you be back soon ?

JOHN : No.

MIRALDA : When will you come back, John ?

[*She is reclining, looking fair, fanning slightly.*

JOHN : In half an hour.

MIRALDA : In half an hour ?

JOHN : Yes.

[*Exit.*

MIRALDA : Half an hour.

[*Her fan is laid down. She clutches it with sudden resolve. She goes to the wall, fanning herself slowly. She leans against it. She fans herself now with obvious deliberation. Three times the great fan goes flat against the window, and then again separately three times; and then she puts it against the window once with a smile of ecstasy. She has signalled. She returns to the cushions and reclines with beautiful care, fanning herself softly.*

[Enter the Vizier, HAFIZ EL ALCOLAHN.

HAFIZ : Lady ! You bade me come.

MIRALDA : Did I, Hafiz ?

HAFIZ : Lady, your fan.

MIRALDA : Ah, I was fanning myself.

HAFIZ : Seven times, lady.

MIRALDA : Ah, was it ? Well, now you're here . . .

HAFIZ : Lady, O star of these times. O light over lonely marshes. (*He kneels by her and embraces her.*) Is the Shereef gone, lady ?

MIRALDA : For half an hour, Hafiz.

HAFIZ : How know you for half an hour ?

MIRALDA : He said so.

HAFIZ: He said so? Then is the time to fear,
if a man say so.

MIRALDA: I know him.

HAFIZ: In our country who knows any man so
much? None.

MIRALDA: He'll be away for half an hour.

HAFIZ (*embracing*): O, exquisite lily of unattain-
able mountains.

MIRALDA: Ah, Hafiz, would you do a little thing
for me?

HAFIZ: I would do all things, lady, O evening
star.

MIRALDA: Would you make me a queen, Hafiz?

HAFIZ: If—if the Shereef were gathered?

MIRALDA: Even so, Hafiz.

HAFIZ: Lady, I would make you queen of all that
lies west of the passes.

MIRALDA: You would make me queen?

HAFIZ: Indeed, before all my wives, before all
women, over all Shaldomir, named the
elect.

MIRALDA: O, well, Hafiz; then you may kiss me.
[HAFIZ does so *ad lib.*

Hafiz, the Shereef has irked me.

HAFIZ: Lady, O singing star, to all men is the
hour.

MIRALDA: The appointed hour?

HAFIZ : Even the appointed hour, the last,
leading to darkness.

MIRALDA : Is it written, think you, that the
Shereef's hour is soon ?

HAFIZ : Lady, O dawn's delight, let there be a
banquet. Let the great ones of Shal-
domir be bidden there.

MIRALDA : There shall be a banquet, Hafiz.

HAFIZ : Soon, O lady. Let it be soon, sole lily
of the garden.

MIRALDA : It shall be soon, Hafiz.

[More embraces.]

HAFIZ : And above all, O lady, bid Daoud, the
son of the baker.

MIRALDA : He shall be bidden, Hafiz.

HAFIZ : O lady, it is well.

MIRALDA : Go now, Hafiz.

HAFIZ : Lady, I go (*giving a bag of gold to*
BAZZALOL). Silence. Silence. Silence.

BAZZALOL (*kneeling*) : O, master !

HAFIZ : Let the tomb speak ; let the stars cry
out ; but do you be silent.

BAZZALOL : Aye, master.

HAFIZ (*to THOOTHOOBABA*) : And you. Though
this one speak, yet be silent, or dread
the shadow of Hafiz el Alcolahn.

[*He drops a bag of gold. THOOTHOOBABA goes down and grabs at the gold ; his eyes gloat over it.*

THOOOTHOOBABA : Master, I speak not. Oh-h-h.
 [Exit HAFIZ.]

[MIRALDA arranges herself on the cushions. She looks idly at each Nubian. The Nubians put each a finger over his lips and go on fanning with one hand.]

MIRALDA : A queen. I shall look sweet as a queen.

[Enter JOHN. She rises to greet him caressingly.]

[Enter DAOUD.]

Oh, you have brought Daoud with you.

JOHN : Why not ?

MIRALDA : You know that I don't like Daoud.

JOHN : I wish to speak with him.

[MIRALDA looks straight at JOHN and moves away in silence. Exit L.]

JOHN : Daoud.

DAOUD : Great master.

JOHN : Daoud, one day in spring, in the cemetery of those called Blessed, beyond the city's gates, you swore to me by the graves of both your parents . . .

DAOUD : Great master, even so I swore.

JOHN : . . . to be true to me always.

DAOUD : There is no Shereef but my master.

JOHN : Daoud, you have kept your word.

DAOUD : I have sought to, master.

JOHN : You have helped me often, Daoud, warned me and helped me often. Through you I knew those currents that run through the deeps of the market, in silence and all men feel them, but a ruler never. You told me of them, and when I knew—then I could look after myself, Daoud. They could do nothing against me then. Well, now I hold this people. I hold them at last, Daoud, and now—well, I can rest a little.

DAOUD : Not in the East, master.

JOHN : Not in the East, Daoud ?

DAOUD : No, master.

JOHN : Why ? What do you mean ?

DAOUD : In Western countries, master, whose tales I have read, in a wonderful book named the "Good Child's History of England," in the West a man hath power over a land, and lo ! the power is his and descends to his son's son after him.

JOHN : Well, doesn't it in the East ?

DAOUD : Not if he does not watch, master ; in the night and the day, and in the twilight between the day and the night, and in the dawn between the night and the day.

JOHN: I thought you had pretty long dynasties in these parts, and pretty lazy ones.

DAOUD: Master, he that was mightiest of those that were kings in Babylon had a secret door prepared in an inner chamber, which led to a little room, the smallest in the palace, whose back door opened secretly to the river, even to great Euphrates, where a small boat waited all the days of his reign.

JOHN: Did he really now? Well, *he* was taking no chances. Did he have to use it?

DAOUD: No, master. Such boats are never used. Those that watch like that do not need to seek them, and the others, they would never be able to reach the river in time, even though the boat were there.

JOHN: I shouldn't like to have to live like that. Why, a river runs by the back of this palace. I suppose palaces usually are on rivers. I'm glad I don't have to keep a boat there.

DAOUD: No, master.

JOHN: Well, what is it you are worrying about? Who is it you are afraid of?

DAOUD: Hafiz el Alcolahn.

JOHN: O, Hafiz. I have no fears of Hafiz. Lately I ordered my spies to watch

him no longer. Why does he hate me ?

DAOUD : Because, most excellent master, you slew Hussein.

JOHN : Slew Hussein ? What is that to do with him ? May I not slay whom I please ?

DAOUD : Even so, master. Even so. But he was Hussein's enemy.

JOHN : His enemy, eh ?

DAOUD : For years he had dreamed of the joy of killing Hussein.

JOHN : Well, he should have done it before I came. We don't hang over things and brood over them for years where I come from. If a thing's to be done, it's done.

DAOUD : Even so, master. Hafiz had laid his plans for years. He would have killed him and got his substance ; and then, when the hour drew near, you came, and Hussein died, swiftly, not as Hafiz would have had him die ; and lo ! thou art the lord of the pass, and Hafiz is no more than a beetle that runs about in the dirt.

JOHN : Well, so you fear Hafiz ?

DAOUD : Not for himself, master. Nay, I fear not Hafiz. But, master, hast thou seen when the thunder is coming, but no rumble is heard, and the sky is scarce yet black, how little winds run

in the grass and sigh and die ; and the flower beckons a moment with its head ; all the world full of whispers, master, all saying nothing ; then the lightning, master, and the anger of God ; and men say it came without warning ? (*Simply.*) I hear those things coming, master.

JOHN : Well ?

DAOUD : Master, it is all silent in the market. Once, when the price of turquoises was high, men abused the Shereef. When the merchant men could not sell their pomegranates for silver they abused the Shereef. It is men's way, master, men's way. Now it is all silent in the market. It is like the grasses with the little winds, that whisper and sigh and die away ; like the flowers beckoning to nothing. And so, master, and so . . .

JOHN : I see, you fear some danger.

DAOUD : I fear it, master.

JOHN : What danger, Daoud ?

DAOUD : Master, I know not.

JOHN : From what quarter, Daoud ?

DAOUD : O master, O sole Lord of Al Shaldomir, named the elect, from that quarter.

JOHN : That quarter ? Why, that is the gracious lady's innermost chamber.

DAOUD : From that quarter, great master, O Lord of the Pass.

JOHN : Daoud, I have cast men into prison for saying less than this. Men have been flogged on the feet for less than this.

DAOUD : Slay me, master, but hear my words.

JOHN : I will not slay you. You are mistaken, Daoud. You have made a great mistake. The thing is absurd. Why, the gracious lady has scarcely seen Hafiz. She knows nothing of the talk of the market. Who could tell her ? No one comes here. It is absurd. Only the other day she said to me . . . But it is absurd, it is absurd, Daoud. Besides, the people would never rebel against me. Do I not govern them well ?

DAOUD : Even so, master.

JOHN : Why should they rebel, then ?

DAOUD : They think of the old times, master.

JOHN : The old times ? Why, their lives weren't safe. The robbers came down from the mountains and robbed the market whenever they had a mind.

DAOUD : Master, men were content in the old times.

JOHN : But were the merchants content ?

DAOUD : Those that loved merchandise were content, master. Those that loved it not went into the mountains.

JOHN: But were they content when they were robbed?

DAOUD: They soon recovered their losses, master. Their prices were unjust and they loved usury.

JOHN: And were the people content with unjust prices?

DAOUD: Some were, master, as men have to be in all countries. The others went into the mountains and robbed the merchants.

JOHN: I see.

DAOUD: But now, master, a man robs a merchant and he is cast into prison. Now a man is slain in the market and his son, his own son, master, may not follow after the aggressor and slay him and burn his house. They are ill-content, master. No man robs the merchants, no man slays them, and the merchants' hearts are hardened and they oppress all men.

JOHN: I see. They don't like good government?

DAOUD: They sigh for the old times, master.

JOHN: I see; I see. In spite of all I have done for them, they want their old bad government back again.

DAOUD: It is the old way, master.

JOHN: Yes, yes. And so they would rebel. Well, we must watch. You have warned

me once again, Daoud, and I am grateful. But you are wrong, Daoud, about the gracious lady. You are mistaken. It is impossible. You are mistaken, Daoud. I know it could not be.

DAOUD: I am mistaken, master. Indeed, I am mistaken. Yet, watch. Watch, master.

JOHN: Well, I will watch.

DAOUD: And, master, if ever I come to you bearing oars, then watch no longer, master, but follow me through the banquet chamber and through the room beyond it. Move as the wild deer move when there is danger, without pausing, without wondering, without turning round; for in that hour, master, in that hour . . .

JOHN: Through the room beyond the banquet chamber, Daoud?

DAOUD: Aye, master, following me.

JOHN: But there is no door beyond, Daoud.

DAOUD: Master, I have prepared a door.

JOHN: A door, Daoud?

DAOUD: A door none wots of, master.

JOHN: Whither does it lead?

DAOUD: To a room that you know not of, a little room; you must stoop, master.

JOHN : O, and then ?

DAOUD : To the river, master.

JOHN : The river ! But there's no boat there.

DAOUD : Under the golden willow, master.

JOHN : A boat ?

DAOUD : Even so, under the branches.

JOHN : Is it come to that ? . . . No, Daoud, all
this is unnecessary. It can't come to that.

DAOUD : If ever I come before you bearing two
oars, in that hour, master, it is
necessary.

JOHN : But you will not come. It will never
come to that.

DAOUD : No, master.

JOHN : A wise man can stop things before they
get as far as that.

DAOUD : They that were kings in Babylon were
wise men, master.

JOHN : Babylon ! But that was thousands of
years ago.

DAOUD : Man changes not, master.

JOHN : Well, Daoud, I will trust you, and if it
ever comes to that . . .

Enter MIRALDA.

MIRALDA : I thought Daoud was gone.

DAOUD : Even now I go, gracious lady.

[*Exit DAOUD. Rather strained silence
with JOHN and MIRALDA till he*

goes. She goes and makes herself comfortable on the cushions. He is not entirely at ease.

MIRALDA: You had a long talk with Daoud.

JOHN: Yes, he came and talked a good deal.

MIRALDA: What about?

JOHN: O, just talk; you know these Eastern people.

MIRALDA: I thought it was something you were discussing with him.

JOHN: O, no.

MIRALDA: Some important secret.

JOHN: No, not at all.

MIRALDA: You often talk with Daoud.

JOHN: Yes, he is useful to me. When he talks sense I listen, but to-day . . .

MIRALDA: What did he come for to-day?

JOHN: O, nothing.

MIRALDA: You have a secret with Daoud that you will not share with me.

JOHN: No, I have not.

MIRALDA: What was it he said?

JOHN: He said there was a king in Babylon who . . .

[DAOUD slips into the room.

MIRALDA: In Babylon? What has that to do with us?

JOHN: Nothing. I told you he was not talking sense.

MIRALDA: Well, what did he say?

JOHN: He said that in Babylon . . .

DAOUD: Hist!

JOHN: O, well . . .

[MIRALDA glares, but calms herself
and says nothing.]

[Exit DAOUD.]

MIRALDA: What did Daoud say of Babylon?

JOHN: O, well, as you say, it had nothing to do with us.

MIRALDA: But I wish to hear it.

JOHN: I forget.

[For a moment there is silence.]

MIRALDA: John, John. Will you do a little thing for me?

JOHN: What is it?

MIRALDA: Say you will do it, John. I should love to have one of my little wishes granted.

JOHN: What is it?

MIRALDA: Kill Daoud, John. I want you to kill Daoud.

JOHN: I will not.

[He walks up and down in front of
the two Nubians in silence. She

plucks petulantly at a pillow. She suddenly calms herself. A light comes into her eyes. The Nubians go on fanning. JOHN goes on pacing.

MIRALDA : John, John, I have forgotten my foolish fancies.

JOHN : I am glad of it.

MIRALDA : I do not really wish you to kill Daoud.

JOHN (*same voice*) : I'm glad you don't.

MIRALDA : I have only one fancy now, John.

JOHN : Well, what is it ?

MIRALDA : Give a banquet, John. I want you to give a banquet.

JOHN : A banquet ? Why ?

MIRALDA : Is there any harm in my fancy ?

JOHN : No.

MIRALDA : Then if I may not be a queen, and if you will not kill Daoud for me, give a banquet, John. There is no harm in a banquet.

JOHN : Very well. When do you want it ?

MIRALDA : To-morrow, John. Bid all the great ones to it, all the illustrious ones in Al Shaldomir.

JOHN : Very well.

MIRALDA : And bid Daoud come.

JOHN : Daoud ? You asked me to kill him.

MIRALDA : I do not wish that any longer, John.

JOHN : You have queer moods, Miralda.

MIRALDA : May I not change my moods, John ?

JOHN : I don't know. I don't understand them.

MIRALDA : And ask Hafiz el Alcolahn, John.

JOHN : Hafiz ? Why ?

MIRALDA : I don't know, John. It was just my fancy.

JOHN : Your fancy, eh ?

MIRALDA : That was all.

JOHN : Then I will ask him. Have you any other fancy ?

MIRALDA : Not now, John.

JOHN : Then go, Miralda.

MIRALDA : Go ?

JOHN : Yes.

MIRALDA : Why ?

JOHN : Because I command it.

MIRALDA : Because you command it ?

JOHN : Yes, I, the Shereef of Al Shaldomir.

MIRALDA : Very well.

[Exit L.]

[He walks to the door to see that she is really gone. He comes back to centre and stands with back to audience, pulling a cord quietly from his pocket and arranging it.

[He moves half left and comes up

behind BAZZALOL. Suddenly he slips the cord over BAZZALOL's head and tightens it round his neck.

[BAZZALOL flops on his knees.

[THOOTHOOBABA goes on fanning.

JOHN : Speak !

[BAZZALOL is silent.

[JOHN tightens it more. THOOTHOOBABA goes on quietly fanning.

BAZZALOL : I cannot.

JOHN : If you would speak, raise your left hand. If you raise your left hand and do not speak you shall die.

[BAZZALOL is silent. JOHN tightens more. BAZZALOL raises his great flabby left hand high. JOHN releases the cord. BAZZALOL blinks and moves his mouth.

BAZZALOL : Gracious Shereef, one visited the great lady and gave us gold, saying, " Speak not."

JOHN : When ?

BAZZALOL : Great master, one hour since.

JOHN (*a little viciously*) : Who ?

BAZZALOL : O heaven-sent, he was Hafiz al Alcolahn.

JOHN : Give me the gold.

[BAZZALOL gives it.

(To THOOTHOOBABA.) Give me the gold.

THOOOTHOOBABA : Master, none gave me gold.

[JOHN touches his dagger, and looks like using it.

[THOOOTHOOBABA gives it.

JOHN : Take back your gold. Be silent about this. You too.

[He throws gold to BAZZALOL.

Gold does not make you silent, but there is a thing that does. What is that thing ? Speak. What thing makes you silent ?

BAZZALOL : O, great master, it is death.

JOHN : Death, eh ? And how will you die if you speak ? You know how you will die ?

BAZZALOL : Yes, heaven-sent.

JOHN : Tell your comrade, then.

BAZZALOL : We shall be eaten, great master.

JOHN : You know by what ?

BAZZALOL : Small things, great master, small things. Oh-h-h-h. Oh-h-h.

[THOOOTHOOBABA's knees scarcely hold him.

JOHN : It is well.

CURTAIN.

ACT III. SCENE II

A small street. Al Shaldomir.

Time : Next day.

Enter L. the SHEIK OF THE BISHAREENS.

He goes to an old green door, pointed of course in the Arabic way.

SHEIK OF THE BISHAREENS : Ho, Bishareens !

[*The BISHAREENS run on.*

SHEIK : It is the place and the hour.

BISHAREENS : Ah, ah !

SHEIK (*to FIRST BISHAREEN*) : Watch.

[*FIRST BISHAREEN goes to right and watches up sunny street.*

FIRST BISHAREEN : He comes.

[*Enter HAFIZ EL ALCOLAHN. He goes straight up to the SHEIK and whispers.*

SHEIK (*turning*) : Hear, O Bishareens.

[*HAFIZ places flute to his lips.*

A BISHAREEN : And the gold, master ?

SHEIK : Silence ! It is the signal.

[*HAFIZ plays a weird, strange tune on his flute.*

HAFIZ: So.

SHEIK: Master, once more.

[HAFIZ raises the flute again to his lips.

SHEIK: Hear, O Bishareens!

[He plays the brief tune again.

HAFIZ (to SHEIK): Like that.

SHEIK: We have heard, O master.

[He walks away L. Hands move in the direction of knife-hilts.

THE BISHAREENS: Ah, ah!

[Exit HAFIZ.

[He plays a merry little tune on his flute as he walks away.

CURTAIN.

ACT III. SCENE III

*The banqueting hall. A table along the back.
JOHN and MIRALDA seated with notables of Al
Shaldomir.*

*JOHN sits in the centre, with MIRALDA on his right
and, next to her, HAFIZ EL ALCOLAHN.*

MIRALDA (*to JOHN*) : You bade Daoud be present ?

JOHN : Yes.

MIRALDA : He is not here.

JOHN : Daoud not here ?

MIRALDA : No.

JOHN : Why ?

MIRALDA : We all obey you, but not Daoud.

JOHN : I do not understand it.

A NOTABLE : The Shereef has frowned.

[Enter R. an OFFICER-AT-ARMS. *He halts at once and salutes with his sword, then takes a side pace to his left, standing against the wall, sword at the carry.*

[*JOHN acknowledges salute by touching his forehead with the inner tips of his fingers.*

OFFICER-AT-ARMS: Soldiers of Al Shaldomir ; with the dance-step ; march.

[Enter R. some men in single file ; uniform, pale green silks ; swords at carry. They advance in single file, in a slightly serpentine way, deviating to their left a little out of the straight and returning to it, stepping neatly on the tips of their toes. Their march is fantastic and odd without being exactly funny.

[The OFFICER-AT-ARMS falls in on their left flank and marches about level with the third or fourth man.

[When he reaches the centre he gives another word of command.

OFFICER-AT-ARMS: With reverence : Salute.

[The actor who takes this part should have been an officer or N.C.O.

[JOHN stands up and acknowledges their salute by touching his forehead with the fingers of the right hand, palm turned inwards.

[Exeunt soldiers L. JOHN sits down.

A NOTABLE: He does not smile this evening.

A WOMAN: The Shereef ?

NOTABLE: He has not smiled.

[Enter R. ZABNOOL, a Conjuror, with brass bowl. He bows. He

walks to centre opposite JOHN. He exhibits his bowl.

ZABNOOL: Behold. The bowl is empty.

[ZABNOOL produces a snake.

ZABNOOL: Ah, little servant of Death.

[He produces flowers.

Flowers, master, flowers. All the way from Nowhere.

[He produces birds.

Birds, master. Birds from Nowhere. Sing, sing to the Shereef. Sing the little empty songs of the land of Nowhere.

[He seats himself on the ground facing JOHN. He puts the bowl on the ground. He places a piece of silk, with queer designs on it, over the bowl. He partly draws the silk away with his left hand and puts in his right. He brings out a young crocodile and holds it by the neck.

CONJURER: Behold, O Shereef; O people, behold; a crocodile.

[He rises and bows to JOHN and wraps up the crocodile in some drapery and walks away. As he goes he addresses his crocodile.

O eater of lambs, O troubler of the rivers, you sought to evade me in an

empty bowl. O thief, O appetite, you sought to evade the Shereef. The Shereef has seen you, O vexer of swimmers, O pig in armour, O . . .

[Exit.]

[SHABEESH, another Conjuror, rushes on.

SHABEESH: Bad man, master ; he very, very bad man.

[He pushes ZABNOOL away roughly, impetus of which carries ZABNOOL to the wings.

Very, very bad man, master.

MIRALDA (reprovingly) : Zabnool has amused us.

SHABEESH: He very, very bad man, lily lady. He get crocodile from devil. From devil Poolyana, lily lady. Very, very bad.

MIRALDA: He may call on devils if he amuse us, Shabeesh.

SHABEESH: But Poolyana my devil. He call on my devil, lily lady. Very, very, very bad. My devil Poolyana.

MIRALDA: Call on him yourself, Shabeesh. Amuse us.

SHABEESH: Shall one devil serve two masters ?

MIRALDA: Why not ?

SHABEESH (beginning to wave priestly conjurer's hands) : Very bad man go away. Go away, bad man : go away, bad man.

Poolyana not want bad man : Poolyana only work for good man. He mighty fine devil. Poolyana, Poolyana. Big, black, fine, furry devil. Poolyana, Poolyana, Poolyana. O fine, fat devil with big angry tail. Poolyana, Poolyana, Poolyana. Send me up fine young pig for the Shereef. Poolyana, Poolyana. Lil yellow pig with curly tail. (*Small pig appears.*) O Poolyana, great Poolyana. Fine black fur and grey fur underneath. Fine ferocious devil, you *my* devil, Poolyana. O, Poolyana, Poolyana, Poolyana. Send me a big beast what chew bad man's crocodile. Big beast with big teeth, eat him like a worm.

[*He has spread large silk handkerchief on floor and is edging back from it in alarm.*

Long nails in him toes, big like lion, Poolyana. Send great smelly big beast —eat up bad man's crocodile.

[*At first stir of handkerchief SHABEESH leaps in alarm.*

He come, he come. I see his teeth and horns.

[*Enter small live rabbit from trapdoor under handkerchief.*

O, Poolyana, you big devil have your liddle joke. You laugh at poor con-

juring man. You send him lil rabbit to eat big crocodile. Bad Poolyana. Bad Poolyana.

[*Whacks ground with stick.*

You plenty bad devil, Poolyana.

[*Whacking it again. Handkerchief has been thrown on ground again. Handkerchief stirs slightly.*

No, no, Poolyana. You not bad devil. You not bad devil. You plenty good devil, Poolyana. No, no, no ! Poor conjuring man quite happy on muddy earth. No, Poolyana, no ! O, no, no, devil. O, no, no ! Hell plenty nice place for devil. Master ! He not my devil ! He other man's devil !

JOHN : What's this noise ? What's it about ? What's the matter ?

SHABEESH (*in utmost terror*) : He coming, master ! Coming !

ZABNOOL : Poolyana, Poolyana, Poolyana. Stay down, stay down, Poolyana. Stay down in nice warm hell, Poolyana. The Shereef want no devil to-day.

[*ZABNOOL before speaking returns to centre and pats air over ground where handkerchief lies.*

[*Then SHABEESH and ZABNOOL come together side by side and bow and smile together toward the SHEREEF.*

Gold is thrown to them, which ZABNOOL gathers and hands to SHABEESH, who gives a share back to ZABNOOL.

A NOTABLE : The Shereef is silent.

[Enter three women R. in single file, dancing, and carrying baskets full of pink rose-leaves. They dance across, throwing down rose-leaves, leaving a path of them behind them.

[Exeunt L.

A NOTABLE : Still he is silent.

MIRALDA : Why do you not speak ?

JOHN : I do not wish to speak.

MIRALDA : Why ?

[Enter OMAR with his zither.

OMAR (*singing*) :

Al Shaldomir, Al Shaldomir,
Birds sing thy praises night and day ;
The nightingale in every wood,
Blackbirds in fields profound with may ;
Birds sing of thee by every way.

Al Shaldomir, Al Shaldomir,
My heart is ringing with thee still ;
Though far away, O fairy fields,
My soul flies low by every hill
And misses not one daffodil.

Al Shaldomir, Al Shaldomir,
O mother of my roving dreams,
Blue is the night above thy spires,
And blue by myriads of streams,
Paradise through thy gateway gleams.

MIRALDA : Why do you not wish to speak ?

JOHN : You desire me to speak ?

MIRALDA : No. They all wonder why you do not speak ; that is all.

JOHN : I will speak. They shall hear me.

MIRALDA : O, there is no need to.

JOHN : There *is* a need. (*He rises.*) People of Shaldomir, behold I know your plottings. I know the murmurings that you murmur against me. When I sleep in my inner chamber my ear is in the market, while I sit at meat I hear men whisper far hence and know their innermost thoughts. Hope not to overcome me by your plans nor by any manner of craftiness. My gods are gods of brass ; none have escaped them. They cannot be overthrown. Of all men they favour my people. Their hands reach out to the uttermost ends of the earth. Take heed, for my gods are terrible. I am the Shereef ; if any dare withstand me I will call on my gods and they shall crush him utterly. They shall grind

him into the earth and trample him under, as though he had not been. The uttermost parts have feared the gods of the English. They reach out, they destroy, there is no escape from them. Be warned; for I do not permit any to stand against me. The laws that I have given you, you shall keep; there shall be no other laws. Whoso murmurs shall know my wrath and the wrath of my gods. Take heed, I speak not twice. I spoke once to Hussein. Hussein heard not; and Hussein is dead; his ears are closed for ever. Hear, O people.

HAFIZ: O Shereef, we murmur not against you.

JOHN: I know thoughts and hear whispers. I need not instruction, Hafiz.

HAFIZ: You exalt yourself over us as none did aforetime.

JOHN: Yes. And I will exalt myself. I have been Shereef hitherto, but now I will be king. Al Shaldomir is less than I desire. I have ruled too long over a little country. I will be the equal of Persia. I will be king; I proclaim it. The pass is mine; the mountains shall be mine also. And he that rules the mountains has mastery over all the plains beyond. If the men of the plains will not own it let them make

ready ; for my wrath will fall on them
in the hour when they think me afar,
on a night when they think I dream.
I proclaim myself king over . . .

[HAFIZ pulls out his flute and plays
the weird, strange tune. JOHN looks
at him in horrified anger.

JOHN : The penalty is death ! Death is the
punishment for what you do, Hafiz.
You have dared while I spoke. Hafiz,
your contempt is death. Go to
Hussein. I, the king . . . say it.

[DAOUD has entered R. bearing two
oars. DAOUD walks across, not looking
at JOHN. Exit by small door in L.
near back.

[JOHN gives one look at the banqueters,
then he follows DAOUD. Exit.

[All look astonished. Some rise and
peer. HAFIZ draws his knife.

OMAR (*singing*) :

Al Shaldomir, Al Shaldomir,
The nightingales that guard thy ways
Cease not to give thee, after God
And after Paradise, all praise.

CRIES (*off*) : Kill the unbeliever. Kill the dog.
Kill the Christian.

[Enter the SHEIK OF THE BISHAREENS,
followed by all his men.

SHEIK : We are the Bishareens, master.

[MIRALDA, standing up, right arm akimbo, left arm pointing perfectly straight out towards the small door, hand extended.

MIRALDA: He is there.

[*The BISHAREENS run off through the little door.*

A NOTABLE: Not to interfere with old ways is wisest.

ANOTHER: Indeed, it would have been well for him.

[*The BISHAREENS begin to return looking all about them like disappointed hounds.*

A BISHAREEN: He is not there, master.

HAFIZ: Not there? Not there? Why, there is no door beyond. He must needs be there, and his chief spy with him.

SHEIK (*off*): He is not here.

MIRALDA (*turning round and clawing the wall*): O, I was weary of him. I was weary of him.

HAFIZ: Be comforted, pearl of the morning; he is gone.

MIRALDA: When I am weary of a man he must die.

[*He embraces her knees.*

ZAGBOOLA (*who has come on with a little crowd that followed the BISHAREENS. She is blind*):

Lead me to Hafiz. I am the mother
of Hafiz. Lead me to Hafiz. (*They
lead her near.*) Hafiz! Hafiz!

[*She finds his shoulder and tries to
drag him away.*

HAFIZ: Go! Go! I have found the sole pearl
of the innermost deeps of the sea.

[*He is kneeling and kissing MIRALDA's
hand. ZAGBOOLA wails.*

CURTAIN.

ACT IV. SCENE I

Three years elapse.

Scene : The street outside the Acacias.

Time : Evening.

ALI leans on a pillar-box watching.

JOHN shuffles on L. He is miserably dressed, an Englishman down on his luck.

A nightingale sings far off.

JOHN : A nightingale here. Well, I never.

*Al Shaldomir, Al Shaldomir,
The nightingales that guard thy
ways*

*Cease not to give thee after God
And after Paradise all praise. . . .*

*The infernal place ! I wish I had
never seen it ! Wonder what set me
thinking of that ?*

*[The nightingale sings another bar.
JOHN turns to his left and walks
down the little path that leads to
the door of the Acacias.]*

*I mustn't come here. Mustn't come
to a fine house like this. Mustn't.
Mustn't.*

[He draws near it reluctantly. He puts his hand to the bell and withdraws it. Then he rings and snatches his hand away. He prepares to run away. Finally he rings it repeatedly, feverishly, violently.

[Enter LIZA, opening the door.

LIZA: Ullo, 'Oo's this !

JOHN: I oughtn't to have rung, miss, I know. I oughtn't to have rung your bell ; but I've seen better days, and wondered if—I wondered . . .

LIZA: I oughtn't to 'ave opened the door, that's wot I oughtn't. Now I look at you, I oughtn't to 'ave opened it. Wot does you want ?

JOHN: O, don't turn me away now, miss. I must come here. I must.

LIZA: Must ? Why ?

JOHN: I don't know.

LIZA: Wot do you want ?

JOHN: Who lives here ?

LIZA: Mr. and Mrs. Cater ; firm of Briggs, Cater, and Johnstone. What do you want ?

JOHN: Could I see Mr. Cater ?

LIZA: He's out. Dining at the Mansion House.

JOHN: Oh.

LIZA : He is.

JOHN : Could I see Mrs. Cater ?

LIZA : See Mrs. Cater ? No, of course you couldn't.

[She prepares to shut the door.]

JOHN : Miss ! Miss ! Don't go, miss. Don't shut me out. If you knew what I'd suffered, if you knew what I'd suffered. Don't !

LIZA (*coming forward again*) : Suffered ? Why ? Ain't you got enough to eat ?

JOHN : No, I've had nothing all day.

LIZA : 'Aven't you really now ?

JOHN : No. And I get little enough at any time.

LIZA (*kindly*) : You ought to work.

JOHN : I . . . I can't. I can't bring myself . . . I . . . I've seen better times.

LIZA : Still, you could work.

JOHN : I—I can't grub for halfpennies when I've —when I've . . .

LIZA : When you've what ?

JOHN : Lost millions.

LIZA : Millions ?

JOHN : I've lost everything.

LIZA : 'Ow did you lose it ?

JOHN : Through being blind. But never mind, never mind. It's all gone now, and I'm hungry.

LIZA : 'Ow long 'ave you been down on your luck ?

JOHN : It's three years now.

LIZA : Couldn't get a regular job, like ?

JOHN : Well, I suppose I might have. I suppose it's my fault, miss. But the heart was out of me.

LIZA : Dear me, now.

JOHN : Miss.

LIZA : Yes ?

JOHN : You've a kind face . . .

LIZA : 'Ave I ?

JOHN : Yes. Would you do me a kind turn ?

LIZA : Well, I dunno. I might, as yer so down on yer luck—I don't like to see a man like you are, I must say.

JOHN : Would you let me come into the big house and speak to the missus a moment ?

LIZA : She'd row me awful if I did. This house is very respectable.

JOHN : I feel, if you would, I feel, I feel my luck might change.

LIZA : But I don't know what she'd say if I did.

JOHN : Miss, I must.

LIZA : I don't know wot she'd say.

JOHN : I must come in, miss, I must.

LIZA : I don't know what she'll say.

JOHN: I must. I can't help myself.

LIZA: I don't know what she'll . . .

[JOHN is in, door shuts.

[ALI throws his head up and laughs,
but quite silently.

CURTAIN.

Act IV. SCENE II

The drawing-room at the Acacias.

A moment later.

[*The scene is the same as in Act I, except that the sofa which was red is now green, and the photograph of Aunt Martha is replaced by that of a frowning old colonel. The ages of the four children in the photographs are the same, but their sexes have changed.*

[MARY reading. Enter LIZA.

LIZA: There's a gentleman to see you, mum, which is, properly speaking, not a gentleman at all, but 'e would come in, mum.

MARY: Not a gentleman! Good gracious, Liza, whatever do you mean?

LIZA: 'E would come in, mum.

MARY: But what does he want?

LIZA (*over shoulder*): What does you want?

JOHN (*entering*): I am a beggar.

MARY: O, really? You've no right to be coming into houses like this, you know.

JOHN: I know that, madam, I know that. Yet somehow I couldn't help myself. I've

been begging for nearly three years now, and I've never done this before, yet somehow to-night I felt impelled to come to this house. I beg your pardon, humbly. Hunger drove me to it.

MARY: Hunger?

JOHN: I'm very hungry, madam.

MARY: Unfortunately Mr. Cater has not yet returned, or perhaps he might . . .

JOHN: If you could give me a little to eat yourself, madam, a bit of stale bread, a crust, something that Mr. Cater would not want.

MARY: It's very unusual, coming into a house like this and at such an hour—it's past eleven o'clock—and Mr. Cater not yet returned. Are you really hungry?

JOHN: I'm very, very hungry.

MARY: Well, it's very unusual; but perhaps I might get you a little something.

[She picks up an empty plate from the supper table.

JOHN: Madam, I do not know how to thank you.

MARY: O, don't mention it.

JOHN: I have not met such kindness for three years. I . . . I'm starving. I've known better times.

MARY (*kindly*) : I'll get you something. You've known better times, you say ?

JOHN : I had been intended for work in the City. And then, then I travelled, and—and I got very much taken with foreign countries, and I thought—but it all went to pieces. I lost everything. Here I am, starving.

MARY (*as one might reply to the Mayoress who had lost her gloves*) : O, I'm so sorry.

[JOHN sighs deeply.]

MARY : I'll get a nice bit of something to eat.

JOHN : A thousand thanks to you, madam.

[Exit MARY with the plate.]

LIZA (*who has been standing near the door all the time*) : Well, she's going to get you something.

JOHN : Heaven reward her.

LIZA : Hungry as all that ?

JOHN : I'm on my beam ends.

LIZA : Cheer up !

JOHN : That's all very well to say, living in a fine house, as you are, dry and warm and well-fed. But what have I to cheer up about ?

LIZA : Isn't there anything you could pop ?

JOHN : What ?

LIZA : Nothing you can take to the pawn-shop ? I've tided over times I wanted a bit of cash that way sometimes.

JOHN : What could I pawn ?

LIZA : Well, well you've a watch-chain.

JOHN : A bit of old leather.

LIZA : But what about the watch ?

JOHN : I've no watch.

LIZA : O, funny having a watch-chain then.

JOHN : O, that's only for this ; it's a bit of crystal.

LIZA : Funny bit of a thing. What's it for ?

JOHN : I don't know.

LIZA : Was it give to you ?

JOHN : I don't know. I don't know how I got it.

LIZA : Don't know how you got it ?

JOHN : No, I can't remember at all. But I've a feeling about it, I can't explain what I feel ; but I don't part with it.

LIZA : Don't you ? You might get something on it, likely, and have a square meal.

JOHN : I won't part with it.

LIZA : Why ?

JOHN : I feel I won't. I never have.

LIZA : Feel you won't ?

JOHN : Yes, I have that feeling very strongly. I've kept it always. Everything else is gone.

LIZA : Had it long ?

JOHN : Yes, yes. About ten years. I found I

had it one morning in a train. It's odd that I can't remember.

LIZA: But wot d'yer keep it for?

JOHN: Just for luck.

[LIZA *breaks into laughter.*]

LIZA: Well, you are funny.

JOHN: I'm on my beam ends. I don't know if that is funny.

LIZA: You're as down in your luck as ever you can be, and you go keeping a thing like that for luck. Why, you couldn't be funnier.

JOHN: Well, what would you do?

LIZA: Why, I 'ad a mascot once, all real gold; and I had rotten luck. Rotten luck I had. Rotten.

JOHN: And what did you do?

LIZA: Took it back to the shop.

JOHN: Yes?

LIZA: They was quite obliging about it. Gave me a wooden one instead, what was guaranteed. Luck changed very soon altogether.

JOHN: Could luck like mine change?

LIZA: Course it could.

JOHN: Look at me.

LIZA: You'll be all right one of these days. Give me that mascot.

JOHN: I—I hardly like to. One has an awfully strong feeling with it.

LIZA: Give it to me. It's no good.

JOHN: I—I don't like to.

LIZA: You just give it to me. I tell you it's doing you no good. I know all about them mascots. Give it me.

JOHN: Well, well, I'll give it you. You're the first woman that's been kind to me since . . . I'm on my beam ends.

[*Face in hands—tears.*

LIZA: There, there. I'm going to smash it, I am. These mascots! One's better without 'em. Your luck'll turn, never fear. And you've a nice supper coming.

[*She puts it in a corner of the mantelpiece and hammers it. It smashes.*

[*The photographs of the four children change slightly. The Colonel gives place to Aunt Martha. The green sofa turns red. JOHN's clothes become neat and tidy. The hammer in LIZA's hand turns to a feather duster. Nothing else changes.*

A VOICE (*off, in agony*): Allah! Allah! Allah!

LIZA: Some foreign gentleman must have hurt himself.

JOHN: H'm. Sounds like it . . . Liza.

[LIZA, dusting the photographs on the wall, just behind the corner of the mantelpiece.]

LIZA: Funny. Thought I—thought I 'ad a hammer in my hand.

JOHN: Really, Liza, I often think you have. You really should be more careful. Only—only yesterday you broke the glass of Miss Jane's photograph.

LIZA: Thought it was a hammer.

JOHN: Really, I think it sometimes is. It's a mistake you make too often, Liza. You—you must be more careful.

LIZA: Very well, sir. Funny my thinking I 'ad an 'ammer in my 'and, though.

[She goes to tidy the little supper table.]

[Enter MARY with food on a plate.]

MARY: I've brought you your supper, John.

JOHN: Thanks, Mary. I—I think I must have taken a nap.

MARY: Did you, dear? Thanks, Liza. Run along to bed now, Liza. Good gracious, it's half-past eleven.

[MARY makes final arrangements of supper table.]

LIZA: Thank you, mum.

[Exit.]

JOHN: Mary.

MARY: Yes, John.

JOHN: I—I thought I'd caught that train.

CURTAIN.

THE COMPROMISE OF
THE KING OF THE GOLDEN ISLES

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

THE KING OF THE GOLDEN ISLES: KING HAMARAN.
THE KING'S POLITICIAN.
THE AMBASSADOR OF THE EMPEROR.
THE EMPEROR'S SEEKER.
TWO PRIESTS OF THE ORDER OF THE SUN.
THE KING'S QUESTIONERS.
THE AMBASSADOR'S NUBIAN.
THE HERALD OF THE AMBASSADOR.
THE EMPEROR'S DWARF.
THE DEPUTY CUP-BEARER.
THE KING'S DOOM-BEARER.

THE COMPROMISE OF THE KING OF THE GOLDEN ISLES.

THE KING'S POLITICIAN : A man has fled from the Emperor, and has taken refuge in your Majesty's Court in that part of it called holy.

THE KING : We must give him up to the Emperor.

POLITICIAN : To-day a spearsman came running from Eng-Bathai seeking the man who fled. He carries the barbed spear of one of the Emperor's seekers.

KING : We must give him up.

POLITICIAN : Moreover he has an edict from the Emperor demanding that the head of the man who fled be sent back to Eng-Bathai.

KING : Let it be sent.

POLITICIAN : Yet your Majesty is no vassal of the Emperor, who dwells at Eng-Bathai.

KING : We may not disobey the Imperial edict.

POLITICIAN : Yet—

KING : None hath dared to do it.

POLITICIAN : It is so long since any dared to do it that the Emperor mocks at kings. If your Majesty disobeyed him the Emperor would tremble.

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KING : Ah.

POLITICIAN : The Emperor would say, "There is a great king. He defies me." And he would tremble strangely.

KING : Yet—if—

POLITICIAN : The Emperor would fear you.

KING : I would fain be a great king—yet—

POLITICIAN : You would win honour in his eyes.

KING : Yet is the Emperor terrible in his wrath.
He was terrible in his wrath in the olden time.

POLITICIAN : The Emperor is old.

KING : This is a great affront that he places upon a king, to demand a man who has come to sanctuary in that part of my Court called holy.

POLITICIAN : It is a great affront.

[Enter the SEEKER. *He abases himself.*

SEEKER : O King, I have come with my spear, seeking for one that fled the Emperor and has found sanctuary in your Court in that part called holy.

KING : It has not been the wont of the kings of my line to turn men from our sanctuary.

SEEKER : It is the Emperor's will.

KING : It is not *my* will.

SEEKER : Behold the Emperor's edict.

[*The KING takes it. The SEEKER goes towards the door.*

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SEEKER : I go to sit with my spear by the door of
the place called holy.

[*Exit SEEKER.*]

KING : The edict, the edict. We must obey the
edict.

POLITICIAN : The Emperor is old.

KING : True, we will defy him.

POLITICIAN : He will do nothing.

KING : And yet the edict.

POLITICIAN : It is of no importance.

KING : Hark. I will not disobey the Emperor. Yet
will I not permit him to abuse the sanc-
tuary of my Court. We will banish the
man who fled from Eng-Bathai. [*To his*
DOOM-BEARER.] Hither, the Doom-
Bearer ; take the black ivory spear, the
wand of banishment, that lies on the left
of my throne, and point it at the man
that shelters in the holy place of my
Court. Then show him the privy door
behind the horns of the altar, so that he
go safely hence and meet not the
Emperor's seeker.

[*The DOOM-BEARER bows and takes the
spear on the flat of both his hands.
The shaft is all black, but the head is
of white ivory. It is blunt and
clearly ceremonial. Exit.*]

[*To POLITICIAN.*

Thus we shall be safe from the wrath of the

THE KING OF THE GOLDEN ISLES

Emperor, and the holy place of my Court will not be violate.

POLITICIAN: Had your Majesty scorned the Emperor it were better. He is old and durst not take vengeance.

KING: I have decided, and the man is banished.

[A HERALD marches in and blows his trumpet.]

HERALD: The Ambassador of the Emperor.

[Enter the AMBASSADOR. He bows to the King from his place near the door.]

KING: For what purpose to my Court from Eng-Bathai comes thus the Ambassador of the Emperor?

AMBASSADOR: I bring to the King's Majesty a gift from the great Emperor [AMBASSADOR and his men bow] who reigns in Eng-Bathai, the reward of obedience to his edict, a goblet of inestimable wine.

[He signs and there enters a page bearing a goblet of glass. He has a pretty complexion and yellow hair falling as low as his chin and curling inwards. He wears a cerise belt round his tunic exactly matching the wine in the goblet he carries.]

He prays you drink it, and to know that it was made by vintners whose skill is lost, and stored in secret cellars over a hundred

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years ; and that the vineyards whence it came have been long since whelmed by war, and only live now in legend and this wine.

KING : A gift, you say, for obedience.

AMBASSADOR : A gift from the old wine-gardens of the sun.

KING : How knew the Emperor that I had thus obeyed him ?

AMBASSADOR : It has not been men's wont to disobey the Emperor.

KING : Yet if I have sheltered this man in the holy place of my Court ?

AMBASSADOR : If that be so the Emperor bids you drink out of this golden goblet [*he signs and it is brought on by a bent and ugly dwarf*] and wishes you farewell.

KING : Farewell, you say ?

AMBASSADOR : Farewell.

KING : What have you in the goblet ?

AMBASSADOR : It is no common poison, but a thing so strange and deadly that the serpents of Lebutharna go in fear of it. Yea, travellers there hold high a goblet of this poison, at arm's length as they go. The serpents hide their heads for fear of it. Even so the travellers pass the desert safely, and come to Eng-Bathai.

KING : I have not sheltered this man.

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AMBASSADOR: There is no need then for this Imperial gift.

[He throws the liquid out of the goblet through the doorway on to the marble. A great steam goes up.]

KING: Neither have I ordered that his head be sent back to Eng-Bathai.

AMBASSADOR: Alas, for so rare a wine.

[He pours it away.]

KING: I have banished him and he is safe. I have neither obeyed nor disobeyed.

AMBASSADOR: The Emperor therefore bids you choose the gift that he honours himself by sending to your Court.

[He signs. Enter a massive NUBIAN with two cups.]

The Emperor bids you drink one of these cups.

[The huge NUBIAN moves up close to the KING holding up the two cups on a tray.]

[The POLITICIAN slinks off. Exit L.]

KING: The cups are strangely alike.

AMBASSADOR: Only one craftsman in the City of Smiths ever discerned a difference. The Emperor killed him, and now no one knows.

KING: The potions also are alike.

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AMBASSADOR : Strangely alike. [*The King hesitates.*]
The Emperor bids you choose his gift and drink.

KING : The Emperor has poisoned the cups !

AMBASSADOR : You greatly wrong the Emperor.
Only one cup is poisoned.

KING : You say that one is poisoned ?

AMBASSADOR : Only one, O King ! Who may say which ?

KING : And what if I refuse to do this thing ?

AMBASSADOR : There are tortures that the Emperor never names. They are not spoken of where the Emperor is. Yet the Emperor makes a sign and they are accomplished. He makes the sign with a certain one of his fingers.

KING (*half to himself*) : How wonderfully they have the look of wine.

AMBASSADOR : One is a wine scarcely less rare, scarcely less jubilant in the wits of man, than that which alas is lost.

[*He glances towards the spot where he threw the other.*

KING : And the other ?

AMBASSADOR : Who may say ? It is the most treasured secret that the Emperor's poisoners guard.

KING : I will send for my butlers that are wise in wine and they shall smell the cups.

AMBASSADOR : Alas, but the Emperor's poisoners

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have added so wine-like a flavour to their most secret draught, that no man may tell by this means which is their work and which that inestimable wine.

KING : I will send for my tasters and they shall taste of the cups.

AMBASSADOR : Alas, so great a risk may not be run.

KING : Risks are the duty of a king's tasters.

AMBASSADOR : If they chanced to taste of the treasure of the Emperor's poisoners—well. But if they, or *any* man of common birth, were to taste of the wine that the Emperor sends only to kings, and even to kings but rarely, that were an affront to the Emperor's ancient wine that could not be permitted.

KING : It is surely permitted that I send for my priests, who tell by divination, having burnt strange herbs to the gods that guard the Golden Isles.

AMBASSADOR : It is permitted.

KING : Send for the priests.

KING (*mainly to himself*) : They shall discern. The priests shall make for me this dreadful choice. They shall burn herbs and discern it. (*To AMBASSADOR.*) My priests are very subtle. They worship the gods that guard the Golden Isles.

AMBASSADOR : The Emperor has other gods.

THE KING OF THE GOLDEN ISLES

[Enter L. two priests of the Order of the Sun. Two acolytes follow. One carries a tripod and the other a gong.

[The priests abase themselves and the acolytes bow. The AMBASSADOR stands with almost Mongolian calm by the door from which he has not moved since he entered.

[The impassive NUBIAN stands motionless near the KING, holding up the cups on a tray.

KING : The Emperor has honoured me with these two cups of wine that I may drink one of them to the grandeur of his throne. I bid you importune the gods that they may surely tell me which it were well to drink.

FIRST PRIEST : We will importune the gods with the savour of rarest spices. We will send up to them the odour of herbs they love. We will commune with them in silence and they shall answer our thoughts, when they snuff the savour of the smoke of the burning on the tripod that is sacred to the Sun.

[The calm of the AMBASSADOR and the impassivity of the NUBIAN grow ominous. The two priests hang over the tripod. They cast herbs upon it. They pass their hands over it. The herbs begin to smoulder. A smoke

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goes up. The priests bend over the smoke. Presently they step back from it.

FIRST PRIEST: The gods sleep.

KING: They sleep! The gods that guard the Golden Isles?

FIRST PRIEST: The gods sleep.

KING: Importune them as never before. I will make sacrifice of many sheep. I will give emeralds to the Monks of the Sun.

[*The second acolyte moves nearer to the tripod and beats listlessly on his great gong at about the pace of a great clock striking slowly.*

FIRST PRIEST: We will importune the gods as never before.

[*They heap up more herbs and spices. The smoke grows thicker and thicker. It streams upwards. They hover about it as before. At a sign the gong ceases.*

The gods have spoken.

KING: What is their message?

FIRST PRIEST: Drink of the cup upon the Nubian's left.

KING: Ah. My gods defend me.

[*He seizes the cup boldly. He looks straight at the AMBASSADOR, whose face remains expressionless, merely*

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watching. He lifts the cup upon the Nubian's left a little up from the tray.

[*He glances towards the priests.*

[*Suddenly he starts. He has seen a strange expression upon the face of the priest. He puts the cup down. He strides a step nearer and looks at his face.*

PRIEST!—Priest!—What is that look in your eyes?

FIRST PRIEST: O King, I know not. I have given the message of the gods.

[*The KING continues to search out his face.*

KING: I mistrust it.

FIRST PRIEST: It is the message of the gods.

KING: I will drink of the other cup!

[*The KING steps back to his place in the front of his throne where the Nubian stands beside him. He takes the cup upon the Nubian's right. He gazes at the priest. He looks round at the Ambassador, but sees nothing in that watchful, expressionless face.*

[*He glances sidelong at the priest, then drinks, draining the cup at some length. He puts it down in silence. The face of the Ambassador and the whole bulk of the Nubian remain motionless.*

THE KING OF THE GOLDEN ISLES

KING : An inestimable wine !

AMBASSADOR : It is the Emperor's joy.

KING : Send for my Questioners.

[*There are weird whistles. Two dark men run on in loin clothes.*

Ask these two priests the Seven Questions.

[*The QUESTIONERS run nimbly up to the two priests and lead them away by the arm.*

THE TWO ACOLYTES : O, O, O. Oh, oh.

[*They show extreme horror. The AMBASSADOR bows to the King.*

KING : You do not leave us at once ?

AMBASSADOR : I go back to the Emperor, whom it is happiness to obey, and length of days.

[*He bows and walks away. The HERALD marches out, then the AMBASSADOR ; the PAGE, the DWARF and the NUBIAN follow.*

[*Exeunt.*

[*The HERALD is heard blowing upon his trumpet the same notes as when he entered, one merry bar of music.*

[*The tray and two precious cups, one empty and the other full, are left glittering near the KING.*

KING (*looking at cups*) : Those are rare emeralds that glisten there ! Yet an evil gift. (*To the moaning acolytes.*) Be silent ! Your priests sinned strangely.

THE KING OF THE GOLDEN ISLES

[*The acolytes continue to moan.*

[Enter one of the QUESTIONERS. He has sweat on his face and his hair has become damp and unkempt.

QUESTIONER: We have asked the Seven Questions.

KING: Well?

QUESTIONER: They have not answered.

KING: Not answered!

QUESTIONER: Neither man has confessed.

KING: Oho! Do I keep Questioners that bring me no answers?

QUESTIONER: We questioned them to the uttermost.

KING: And neither man confessed?

QUESTIONER: They would not confess.

KING: Ask them the Supreme Question.

[*The acolytes break out into renewed moaning.*

QUESTIONER: It shall be asked, O King.

[Exit QUESTIONER. *The acolytes moan on.*

KING: They would have made me drink of a poisoned cup. I say there is poison in that cup. Your priests would have had me drink it. (*The acolytes only answer by moans.*) Bid them confess. Bid them confess their crime and why it was done, and the Supreme Question shall be spared them. (*The acolytes only*

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answer by moans.) Strange ! They have done strangely. (*To acolytes.*) Why has your priest spoken falsely ? (*The acolytes only moan.*) Why has he spoken falsely in the name of the gods ? (*The acolytes moan on.*) Be silent ! Be silent ! May I not question whom I will ? (*To himself.*) They prophesied falsely in the name of the gods.

[Enter the QUESTIONERS.

FIRST QUESTIONER : The Supreme Question is asked.

[*The acolytes suddenly cease moaning.*

KING : Well ?

FIRST QUESTIONER : They would not answer.

KING : They would not answer the Supreme Question ?

FIRST QUESTIONER : They spoke at last, but they would not answer the question. They would not confess.

KING : What said they at last ?

FIRST QUESTIONER : O, the King's Majesty, they but spake idly.

KING : What said they ?

FIRST QUESTIONER : O, the King's Majesty, they said nought fitting.

KING : They muttered so that no man heard them clearly ?

FIRST QUESTIONER : They spake. But it was not fitting.

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KING: Did they speak of small things happening long ago?

FIRST QUESTIONER: O, the King's Majesty, it was not fitting.

KING: What said they? Speak!

FIRST QUESTIONER: The man you gave to me, O King, said: "No man that knew the counsels of the gods, who alone see future things, would say the gods advised King Hamaran ill when they bade him drink out of a poisoned cup." Then I put the question straightly and he died.

KING: The gods! He said it was the gods! . . . And the other?

SECOND QUESTIONER: He also said the same, O the King's Majesty.

KING: Both said the same. They were questioned in different chambers?

FIRST QUESTIONER: In different chambers, O King. I questioned mine in the Red Chamber.

KING (*to SECOND QUESTIONER*): And yours?

SECOND QUESTIONER: In the Chamber of Rats.

KING: Begone!

[*Exeunt QUESTIONERS.*

So . . . It *was* the gods.

[*The acolytes are crouched upon the floor.
He does not notice them since they
ceased to moan.*

The gods! With what dark and dreadful thing have they clouded the future?

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Well, I will face it ! But what is it ?
Is it one of those things a strong man
can bear ? Or is it——?

The future is more terrible than the
grave, that has its one secret only.

No man, he said, could say that the gods
had advised me ill when they bade me
drink out of a poisoned cup.

What have the gods seen ? What dread-
ful work have they overlooked where
Destiny sits alone, making evil years ?

The gods, he said, who alone see future
things.

Yes, I have known men who never were
warned by the gods, and did not drink
poison, and came upon evil days, suddenly
like a ship upon rocks no mariner knows.
Yes, poison to some of *them* would have
been very precious.

The gods have warned me and I have not
hearkened, and must go on alone : must
enter that strange country of the future
whose paths are so dark to man . . . to
meet a doom there that the gods have
seen.

The gods have seen it ! How shall I
thwart the gods ? How fight against the
shapers of the hills ?

Would that I had been warned. Would
I had heeded when they bade me drink
of the cup the Ambassador said was
poisoned.

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[*Far off is heard that merry bar of music blown by the AMBASSADOR'S HERALD on his horn.*]

Is it too late?

There it stands yet with its green emeralds winking.

[*He clutches it and looks down into it.*
How like to wine it is, which is full of dreams. It is silent and dreamy like the gods, whose dreams we are.

Only a moment in their deathless minds : then the dream passes.

[*He lifts up his arm and drinks it seated upon his throne with his head back and the great cup before his face.*
The audience begin to wonder when he will put it down. Still he remains in the attitude of a drinker. The acolytes begin to peer eagerly. Still he remains upright with the great cup to his lips. *The acolytes patter away and the KING is left alone.*

[Enter the KING'S POLITICIAN hurriedly.
He goes up to the KING and seizes his right arm and tries to drag the cup away from his lips, but the KING is rigid and his arm cannot be moved.
He steps back lifting up his hands.

POLITICIAN : Oh-h !

[Exit. You hear him announcing solemnly

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King Hamaran . . . is dead !

[A murmur is heard of men, at first mournful. It grows louder and louder and then breaks into these clear words.

Zarabardes is King ! Zarabardes is King !
Rejoice ! Rejoice ! Zarabardes is King !
Zarabardes ! Zarabardes ! Zarabardes !

CURTAIN.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

THE PRINCE OF ZOON.

PRINCE MELIFLOR.

QUEEN ZOOMZOOMARMA.

LADY OOZIZI.

OOMUZ, *a Common Soldier.*

THE GLORY OF XIMENUNG.

THE OVERLORD OF MOOMOOMON.

PRINCE HUZ.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

SCENE I

Time : June.

Scene : In the Palace of Zoorm ; the Hall of the Hundred Princes.

The Princes sit at plain oaken tables with pewter mugs before them. They wear bright grass-green cloaks of silk ; they might wear circlets of narrow silver with one large hyacinth petal rising from it at intervals of an inch.

OOMUZ, a Common Soldier, huge and squat, with brown skin and dense black beard, stands just inside the doorway, holding a pike, guarding the golden treasure.

The golden treasure lies in a heap three or four feet high near the right back corner.

SENTRIES, also brown-skinned and bearded, carrying pikes, pass and repass outside the great doorway.

THE GLORY OF XIMENUNG : Heigho, Moomoomon.

THE OVERLORD OF MOOMOOMON : Heigho, Glory of Ximenung.

XIMENUNG : Weary ?

MOOMOOMON : Aye, weary.

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ANOTHER: Heigho.

PRINCE MELIFLOR (*sympathetically*): What wearies you?

MOOMOOMON: The idle hours and the idle days.
Heigho.

OTHERS: Heigho.

MELIFLOR: Speak not against the idle hours,
Moomoomon.

MOOMOOMON: Why then, lord of the sweet lands?

MELIFLOR: Because in idleness are all things, all
things good.

XIMENUNG: Heigho, I am weary of the idle hours.

MOOMOOMON: You would work then?

XIMENUNG: No-o. That is not our destiny.

MELIFLOR: Let us be well contented with our lot.
The idle hours are our sacred treasure.

XIMENUNG: Yes, I am well contented, and yet . . .

MOOMOOMON (*contemplatively*): And yet . . .

XIMENUNG: I sometimes dream that were it not
for our glorious state, and this tradition
of exalted ease, it might, it might be
pleasant . . .

MOOMOOMON: To toil, to labour, to raid the
golden hoards.

XIMENUNG: Yes, Moomoomon.

MELIFLOR: Never! Never!

OTHERS: No. No. No.

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ANOTHER: And yet . . .

MELIFLOR: No, never. We should lose our glorious ease, the heritage that none may question.

XIMENUNG: What heritage is that, Prince Meliflor?

MELIFLOR: It is all the earth. To labour is to lose it.

MOOMOOMON: If we could toil we should gain some spot of earth that our labour would seem to make our own. How happily the workers come home at evening.

MELIFLOR: It would be to lose all.

PRINCE OF ZOON: How lose it, Meliflor?

MELIFLOR: To us alone the idle hours are given. The sky, the fields, the woods, the summer winds are for us alone. All others put the earth to uses. This or that field has this or that use; here one may go and another may not. They have each their bit of earth and become slaves to its purpose. But for us, ah! for us, is all; the gift of the idle hours.

SOME: Hurrah! Hurrah for the idle hours.

ZOON: Heigho. The idle hours weary me.

MELIFLOR: They give us all the earth and sky to contemplate. Both are for us.

MOOMOOMON: True. Let us drink, and speak of the blue sky.

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MELIFLOR (*lifting mug*) : And all our glorious heritage.

XIMENUNG (*putting hand to mug*) : Aye, it is glorious, and yet . . .

[Enter the RAIDERS of the Golden Hoard with spears and, in the other hand, leather wallets the size of your fist ; these they cast on the heap. Nuggets the size of big filberts escape from some so that the heap is partly leather and partly gold. These wallets should be filled with nuggets of lead, about the size described, not one lump of lead and not sawdust or rags. Nothing destroys illusion on the stage more than a cannon ball falling with a soft pat. They look scowlingly at the Princes.]

[Exeunt the RAIDERS. The Princes have scarcely noticed them.]

MELIFLOR : See how they waste the hours.

XIMENUNG : They have brought treasure from the Golden Hoard.

ZOON : Yes, from the Golden Hoard beyond the marshes. I went there once with old brown Oomuz there.

MELIFLOR : Of what avail is it to come back burdened thus ? Has not the Queen more wealth than she'll ever need ?

MOOMOOMON : Aye, the Queen needs nothing more.

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ZOON : How can we know that ?

MOOMOOMON : Why not ?

ZOON : The Queen obeys old impulses. Her sires are dead. Who knows whence those impulses come ? How can we say what they are ?

MOOMOOMON : She cannot need more wealth than what is here.

MELIFLOR : No, no, she cannot.

ZOON : She needs more, for she has bidden them go again to the Golden Hoards. Her impulses have demanded it.

MOOMOOMON : Then there is no reason in her impulses.

ZOON : They do not come from reason.

MOOMOOMON : So I said.

ZOON : They come from Fate.

MOOMOOMON : From Fate !

[*There is a hush at this. Oomuz comes nearer and kneels down.*

OOMUZ : Oh, Masters, Masters. If there be anything greater, greater than the Queen, speak not of it, Masters, speak not its name.

ZOON : No, Oomuz. We need nothing greater.

OOMUZ : The name frightened me, Mighty Highness.

ZOON : Yes, yes, Oomuz ; there is only the Queen.

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Moomoomon : No, there is nothing greater than the Queen, and she has no need of anything more than the treasure that he guards there.

Oomuz : There is one thing more.

Moomoomon : More ? What is that ?

Oomuz : There is one thing more. The Queen needs one thing more. This has been told us and we know.

Moomoomon : What is it ?

Oomuz : How should we know that ? None knows the need of the Queen.

[Oomuz returns to guard his heap.]

Zoon : What think you, Oomuz ? What think you is this need of the Queen ?

[Oomuz shakes his head about three times. Prince of Zoon sighs.]

SEVERAL PRINCES (*together wearily*) : Heigho.

Melifor : Take comfort in our heritage, illustrious comrades. Come ! We will drink to the sun.

Some : To the sun ! To the sun ! (*They drink.*)

Meliflor : To the golden idle hours ! (*He drinks.*) Let us be worthy, glorious companions, of our exalted calling. Let us enjoy the days of idleness. Sing to us, mighty one of Zoon, as the idle hours go by. Sing us a song.

Moomoomon (*idly*) : Yes, sing to us.

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ZOON : As you all know, I can but hum. But I will hum you a song that I heard yesterday ; very strange it was ; sung in the meadows by two that were not of our people ; sung in the evening. I heard it as I loitered home from the meadows beyond the marshes. There is no ease in the song, and yet . . .

MOOMOOMON : Hum it to us.

ZOON : They sang it together, the two that were not of our people.

[*He hums a song. They all lift up their heads from their listlessness.*

MELIFLOR (*wonderingly*) : That is a song that is new.

ZOON : Yes, it is new to me.

MELIFLOR : It is like an old song.

ZOON : Yes, perhaps it is old.

MELIFLOR : What is the song ?

ZOON : It tells of love.

THE PRINCES : Ah-h !

[*They seem to wake as though young and strong out of sleep. There is a great commotion among them. The sentries outside are utterly unmoved. OOMUZ, without sharing any of the excitement of the Princes, now nods his head solemnly as he had once shaken it.*

MOOMOOMON : Love ! It must have been that that I felt that day in the twilight as I came

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back round the peak of Zing-gee Mountain.

XIMENUNG : You felt it, Moomoomon ? Tell us.

MOOOMOON : All the air seemed gold, seemed gold of a sudden. Through it I saw fair fields, glittering green far down, glimpsed between clumps of the heather. The gold was all about them, yet they shone with their own fair colours. Ah, how can I tell you all I saw ? My feet seemed scarce to touch the slope of the mountain ; I too seemed one with the golden air in which all things were shining.

XIMENUNG : And this was Love ?

MOOOMOON : I know not. It was some strange new thing. It was strange and new like this song.

MELIFLOR : Perhaps it was some other strange new thing.

MOOOMOON : Perhaps. I know not.

ZOON : No. It was Love.

MOOOMOON : And then that evening in the golden light I knew the purpose of Earth and why all things are.

XIMENUNG : What is the purpose, Moomoomon ?

MOOOMOON : I know not. I was content. I troubled not to remember.

ZOON : It was love.

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XIMENUNG : Let us love.

OTHERS : Aye.

HUZ : Aye, that is best of all.

MELIFLOR : No, Princes. The best is idleness.
Out of the idle hours all good things
come.

HUZ : I will love. That is best.

MELIFLOR : It is like all things, the gift of the idle
hours. The workers never love. Their
fancies are fastened to the work they do,
and do not roam towards love.

ALL : Love ! Let us love.

MELIFLOR : We will love in idleness and praise the
idle hours.

XIMENUNG : Whom will you love, lord of the
shimmering fields ?

MELIFLOR : I have but to show myself loitering by
lanes in the evening.

XIMENUNG : I too will be there.

MELIFLOR : And when they see me . . .

XIMENUNG : They will see me too . . .

MELIFLOR (*rising*) : Behold me.

XIMENUNG : So I do.

MELIFLOR : Will they look towards you when this
is there ?

XIMENUNG : Are birch-trees seen at dawn fairer
than I ?

MELIFLOR : Behold me ; not a poplar is straighter,

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not a flower is fairer. I will loiter along
the lanes at evening.

[*He draws his sword. XIMENUNG does
the same. MOOMOOMON draws his
too and places it between them.*

MOOMOOMON : Be at peace. I will go to the lanes,
and there need be no quarrel between
you, for *I*

OTHERS : No, no, no

HUZ : We will all go.

ANOTHER : We will all love. Hurrah for love.

[*They have all risen. They wave their
swords on high, not threatening each
other. Zoon alone has not risen.*

MOOMOOMON (*to Zoon*) : You do not speak, Prince
of Zoon. Will you not love along the
idle hours ?

ZOON : Yes, yes. I love.

MOOMOOMON : Come then to the lanes to loiter.
It draws towards evening. Let us all
come to the lanes, where the honeysuckle
is hanging.

ZOON : I love not in the lanes.

MOOMOOMON : Not in the lanes ? Then . . . !

OTHERS : Not in the lanes ?

ZOON : I love her than whom there is no greater on
earth—(*Some PRINCES* : Ah !) unless it
be that name that frightens Oomuz.

MOOMOOMON : He loves the . . . !

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XIMENUNG : The . . .

MELIFLOR : The Queen !

[OOMUZ nods his head again.

ZOON : The Queen.

MOOMOOMON : If the Queen knew such a thing she would flee from the palace.

ZOON : I would pursue.

MOOMOOMON : She would go by Aether Mountain, where her mother went once before her.

ZOON : I would follow.

HUZ : We would all follow.

MELIFLOR : I would follow too. I would dance after her down the little street : the bright heels of my shoes would twinkle : my cloak would float out behind me : I would pursue her and call her name, beyond the street and over the moor as far as Aether Mountain : but I would not come up with her : that would be *too* daring.

ZOON : Love is not a toy, Prince Meliflor. Love is no less than a mood of Destiny.

MELIFLOR : Pooh ! We must enjoy the idle hours that are for us alone.

ZOON : There will be no idle hours on Aether Mountain, following from crag to crag ; if it be true that she would go that way.

MOOMOOMON : It is true. They know it. They say her mother went that way before. It is one of the royal impulses.

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ZOON : Oomuz, did the mother of the Queen go once up Aether Mountain ?

OOMUZ : Aye, and *her* mother.

ZOON : It is true.

XIMENUNG : You are sure of this ?

OOMUZ : We know it. It has been said.

HUZ : We will all follow her up Aether Mountain.

MELIFLOR : We will follow merrily.

XIMENUNG : If we did this what would they do when we returned ?

MELIFLOR : Who ?

XIMENUNG : They.

MELIFLOR : They ? They would not dare to speak to *us*.

XIMENUNG : Who knows what they would dare if we dared go after the Queen ?

MOOMOOMON : They would dare nothing, knowing whence we come.

XIMENUNG : They care not whence we come.

MOOMOOMON : But they care for the event that is in our hands. They dare never touch us because of the event.

MELIFLOR : We are the heirs of the idle hours. For them is work. Surely they dare not leave their work to touch us.

MOOMOOMON : They care only for the event. Because it is prophesied that we are needed for the event we are sacred. Were it not for the event, why . . .

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MELIFLOR : Were it not for the event we might not dare to do it ; but, being sacred, let us enjoy our idle hours.

XIMENUNG : What if the event should one day befall ?

MELIFLOR : It was prophesied long ago and has not come. It will not come for a long time.

MOOMOOMON : No, not for a long time.

[*A sentry passes.*

MELIFLOR : So we will follow the Queen.

HUZ : Yes, we will follow.

MOOMOOMON : We shall be a merry company.

MELIFLOR : Splendid to see.

ZOON : I would follow though I were not guarded for the event. Though the event should befall and we be immune no longer, still I should dare it.

MELIFLOR : I would dare it if I knew what they would do. But knowing not . . .

MOOMOOMON : What matter ? We are guarded by the event.

ZOON : I say I care not.

MELIFLOR : Let us drum with our heels and beat with our scabbards against the benches so that we frighten the Queen. She will run from the palace then, and we will go after her with all our merry company.

MOOMOOMON : Yes, let us drum all together. I will give the word. All together and she will

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run from the palace. We will go after
and our cloaks will stream behind us.

Huz: Brave! And our scabbards will show bright
beneath them.

MELIFLOR: No, I will give the word. When she
flees from the palace I will follow her
first. Crowd not about my cloak as it
streams in the wind. We must throw
up our heels as we run to make our shoes
twinkle. We must show gaily in the
little street. Afterwards we can run
more easily.

Huz: Aye, in the street we must run beautifully.

MOOMOOMON: I think that I should give the word
when we rattle our scabbards and all drum
with our heels; but I waive the point.
But I do not think that the Queen can
run far. She has never left the palace.
How could she run over the moor as far
as Aether Mountain. She will faint at
the end of the street and we shall come
up with her and bow and offer her our
assistance.

MELIFLOR: Good, good. It would be cold and
rocky on Aether Mountain.

MOOMOOMON: The Queen could never go there
over the moor.

Huz: No, she is too dainty.

XIMENUNG: They say she could.

MELIFLOR: They; what do they know? Common

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workers. What should they know of queens?

XIMENUNG: They have the old prophesies that came over the fields from the dawn.

MELIFLOR: Yet they cannot understand the Queen.

XIMENUNG: They say her mother went there.

MELIFLOR: That was long ago. Women are quite different now.

XIMENUNG: Well, give the word.

MELIFLOR: Nay. You shall give the word, Moomomon. When you raise your hand we will all drum with our heels together and rattle our scabbards together, and frighten the Queen.

MOOMOOMON: I honour your courtesy, lord of the deep meadows.

MELIFLOR: We are ready then. When you raise your hand—

[A gust of laughter is heard off, from a far part of the palace.]

MOOMOOMON: Hark! Hark!

MELIFLOR: It is the Queen! She laughed.

HUZ: Could she have guessed . . . ?

MOOMOOMON: I trust not.

MELIFLOR: She—she—cannot have been thinking of us.

MOOMOOMON: She—she—seldom laughs.

HUZ: What can it be?

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Moomoomon : Perhaps it was nothing and yet . . .

Meliflor : Yet it makes me uneasy.

Moomoomon : It is not that I fear, but, when a queen laughs—it makes a feeling in the palace—as though all were not well.

Huz : It makes one have forebodings. One cannot help it.

Meliflor : Perhaps ; perhaps later we could return to our gallant scheme ; for the present I think I'll hide a while.

Moomoomon : Yes, let us hide.

Meliflor : So that if there be anything wrong in the palace it will not find us.

[*Exeunt Moomoomon and Meliflor.*

Huz : Let us hide.

[*Exeunt all but Zoon and Oomuz.*

[*Zoon has sat always with bent head at table. He sits so, still.*

Zoon (*bitterly*) : They would follow the Queen.

Oomuz : Mighty Highness——

Zoon (*still to himself*) : They will come back boasting that they dared follow the Queen.

Oomuz : Mighty Highness.

Zoon : Yes, good Oomuz.

Oomuz : In other times once princes followed a queen and came back boasting. Master, the workers were angry. Be warned, Master, because you and I went together

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once to the hoard beyond the marshes.
Be warned. They were angry, Master.

ZOON : I care not for the workers.

OOMUZ : Master, be warned. It was long ago and
they say they were very angry.

ZOON : I care not, Oomuz. I come not boasting
back from the hills under Aether Moun-
tain. I shall not halt till I have told the
Queen my love. I shall wed with her
who is less only than Fate, if less she be.
I am not as those, Oomuz. Who weds
the Queen is more than the servant of
Fate.

OOMUZ : Master——

*[He stretches out his hands towards Zoon
imploringly.]*

ZOON : Well, Oomuz ?

OOMUZ : Master. There is a doom about the Queen.

ZOON : What doom, Oomuz ?

OOMUZ : We know not, Master. We are simple
people and we know not that. But we
know from of old there is a doom about
her. We know it, Master ; we have been
told from of old.

ZOON : Yes, there could well be a doom about the
Queen.

OOMUZ : Follow not after, Master, when she goes to
Aether Mountain. There is surely a
doom about her. A doom was with her
mother upon that very peak.

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ZOON : Yes, Oomuz, a doom well becomes her.

OOMUZ : Doubt it not, Master ; there is a doom about her.

ZOON : Oomuz, I doubt not. For there is something wonderful about the Queen, beyond all earthly wonders. Something like thunder beyond far clouds or hail hurling from heaven ; there should be indeed a terrible doom about her.

OOMUZ : Master, I have warned you for the sake of the days when we raided the golden hoard beyond the marshes.

ZOON (*taking his hand*) : Thank you, good Oomuz.

[*He goes towards door after the others.*

OOMUZ : But where go you, Master ?

ZOON : I wait to follow the Queen when she goes to Aether Mountain.

[*Exit. OOMUZ weeps silently on to the Queen's Treasure.*

CURTAIN.

SCENE II

The Palace of Zoorm : the Hall of Queen Zoom-zoomarma.

Time : Same as Scene I.

THE QUEEN : Is none worthy to kiss my hand,
Oozizi ; none ?

LADY OOZIZI : Lady, none.

[*The Queen sighs.*

You should not sigh, great lady.

QUEEN : Why should I not sigh, Oozizi ?

Oozizi : Great lady, because such things as sighs pertain only to love.

QUEEN : Love is a joy, Oozizi ; love is a glow. Love makes them dance so lightly along rays of the sunlight. It is made of sunlight and gladness. It is like flowers in twilight. How should they sigh ?

Oozizi : Lady ! Great lady ! Say not such things of love !

QUEEN : Say not such things, Oozizi ? Are they not true ?

Oozizi : True ? Yes, great lady, true. But love is a toy of the humble ; love is a common thing that the lowly use ; love is . . . Great lady, had any overheard you

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speaking then they might have thought,
they might have madly dreamed . . .

QUEEN : Dreamed what, Oozizi ?

Oozizi : Incredible things.

QUEEN (*meditatively*) : I must not love, Oozizi.

Oozizi : Lady ! The common people love.

[*She points to door.*

Lady, the green fields going from here to
the blueness, and bending towards it,
and going wandering on, and the rivers
they meet and the woods that shade the
rivers, all own you for their sovereign.
Lady, a million lime-trees mellow your
realm. The golden hoards are yours.
Yours are the deep fields and the iris
marshes. Yours are the roads of wander-
ing and all ways home. The common
delights of love your mere soldiers know.
Lady, you may not love.

[*The QUEEN sighs. Oozizi continues
her knitting.*

QUEEN : My mother loved, Oozizi.

Oozizi : Lady, for a day. For one day, mighty lady.
As one might stoop in idleness to a
broken toy and pick it up and throw it
again away, so she loved for a day. That
idle fancy of an afternoon tarnished no
pinnacle that shone from her exalted
station. But to love for more than a
day—(*QUEEN's face lights up*)—that were

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to place your high unequalled glory
below a vulgar pastime. One alone may
sit in the golden palace to reign over the
green fields ; but all may love.

QUEEN : Do all love but I, Oozizi ?

Oozizi : Wondrous many, lady.

QUEEN : How know you, Oozizi ?

Oozizi : The common shouts that come up at
evening, the clamour of the lanes ; they
are but from love.

QUEEN : What is love, Oozizi ?

Oozizi : Love is a foolish thing.

QUEEN : How know you, Oozizi ?

Oozizi : They came tittering to me once ; but I
saw the foolishness of it.

QUEEN (*a little sadly*) : And they came no more ?

Oozizi (*a little sadly too*) : No more.

[Both look thoughtfully out into dreams,
the QUEEN on her throne, chin on hand.

[Suddenly a stir is heard from the Hall
of the Hundred Princes.

QUEEN (*alarmed*) : Hark ! What was that ?

Oozizi (*rises, listening anxiously*) : It sounded
to come from the Hall of the
Hundred Princes.

QUEEN : They were never heard here before.

Oozizi : Lady, never.

QUEEN (*anxiously*) : What can it mean ?

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

Oozizi : I know not, lady.

QUEEN : Sound never troubled our inner chamber before.

Oozizi : All is quiet now.

QUEEN : Hark ! (*They listen.*)

Oozizi : All is quiet.

QUEEN : Sound from beyond our wall, Oozizi. How it disturbs. I could not rule over the green fields if sounds came up to me from the further halls full of their strange thoughts. Why do sounds come to me, Oozizi ?

Oozizi : Great lady, it has never been before. It will never be again. You must forget it, lady. You must not let it disturb your reign.

QUEEN : It brought strange thoughts with it, Oozizi.

Oozizi : All is quiet now.

QUEEN : If it came again

Oozizi : Lady, it will not come again. It will come no more. It is quiet.

QUEEN : If it came again . . . Is the door open, Oozizi ? Yes . . . If it came again I should almost flee from the palace.

Oozizi : Lady ! Think not of leaving the golden palace !

QUEEN : If it came again.

Oozizi : It will not come again.

[*The heels of the Princes drum louder, off.*

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

QUEEN : Again, Oozizi !

[Oozizi pants. The QUEEN waits, listening, in fear. Again the heels are heard.

[The QUEEN runs to the small door. She looks out.

Oozizi : Lady ! Lady !

QUEEN : Oozizi.

Oozizi : Lady ! Lady ! You must never leave the palace. You must never leave it. You must not.

QUEEN : Hark, it is quiet now.

Oozizi : Lady, it would be terrible to leave the golden palace. Who would reign ? What would happen ?

QUEEN : It is quiet now. What would happen, Oozizi ?

Oozizi : The world would end.

QUEEN : It is quiet now ; perhaps I need not fly.

Oozizi : Lady, you must not.

QUEEN : And yet I would fain go over those green fields all gleaming with summer, and see the golden hoards that no man guards, glittering with such a light as glows this June.

Oozizi : O, speak not, great lady, of the green fields and June. It is these that have intoxicated the Princes so that they do

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

this unrecorded thing, letting sound of them be heard in your sacred room.

QUEEN : Has June intoxicated them, Oozizi ?

Oozizi : Oh, lady, speak not of June.

QUEEN : Is June so terrible ?

[*She returns towards Oozizi.*

Oozizi : It does strange things.

[*The noise breaks out again.*

Hark !

[*The QUEEN runs to the door again.*

Oozizi stretches out her arms to the QUEEN.

O, lady, never leave the golden palace.

[*The QUEEN listens ; all is silent ; she looks outside.*

QUEEN : I see the green fields gleaming. Strange flowers are standing among them, like princes I have not known.

Oozizi : Oh, lady, speak not of the bewildering fields. They are all enchanted with Summer, and they have maddened the Princes. It is dangerous to look at them, lady.

[*The QUEEN gazes on over the fields.*

And yet you look.

QUEEN : I would fain go far over the strange soft fields ; far and far to the high heathery lands—

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

Oozizi : Lady, all is quiet ; there is no danger ; you must not leave the palace.

QUEEN : Yes, all is quiet.

[*The Queen returns.*

Oozizi : It was a passing madness seized the Princes.

QUEEN : Oozizi, when I hear the sound of all their feet it is dreadful, and I must fly. And when I see the wonderful fields in the sunlight sloping away to lands I have never known, then I long to fly away and away for ever, passing from field to field and land to land.

Oozizi : Lady, no, no !

QUEEN : Oozizi.

Oozizi : Yes, great lady.

QUEEN : There is a mountain there that towers above the earth. It goes up into a calm of which our world knows nothing. Heaven, like a cloak, is draped about its shoulders. Why have none told me of this mountain, Oozizi ?

Oozizi (*awed*) : Aether Mountain.

QUEEN : Why has none told me ?

Oozizi : When your glorious mother, lady, loved for a day . . .

QUEEN : Yes, Oozizi . . .

Oozizi : She went, as all songs tell, to Aether Mountain.

QUEEN (*entranced*) : To Aether Mountain ?

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

Oozizi : So they sing at evening, when they throw down their loads of gold and rest.

QUEEN : To Aether Mountain.

Oozizi : Lady, Destiny sent her ; but you must not go. You must not leave your throne to go to Aether Mountain.

QUEEN : There is a calm upon it not of earth.

Oozizi : You must not go, lady, you must not go.

QUEEN : I will not go.

[The Princes drum again, still louder with their heels.]

Hark !

[Oozizi is frightened. The QUEEN runs to the door.]

It is louder ! They are nearer ! They are coming here !

Oozizi : No, lady. They would not dare !

QUEEN : I must go, Oozizi ; I must go.

Oozizi : No, lady. They will never dare. You must not. Hark ! They come no nearer. June has maddened them, but they come no nearer. They are quiet now. Come back, lady. Leave the door, they come no nearer. See, it is all quiet now. They come no nearer, lady. (*Oozizi catches her by the sleeve.*) Lady, you must not.

QUEEN (*much calmer, gazing away*) : Oozizi, I must go.

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Oozizi : No, no, lady ! All is quiet ; you must not go.

QUEEN (*calmly*) : It is calling for me, Oozizi.

Oozizi : What is calling, lady ? Nothing calls.

QUEEN : It is calling, Oozizi.

Oozizi : Oh, lady, all is silent. No one calls.

QUEEN : It is calling for me now, Oozizi.

Oozizi : No, no, lady. What calls ?

QUEEN : Aether Mountain is calling. I know now who called my mother. It was Aether Mountain, Oozizi ; he is calling.

Oozizi : I—I scarce dare look out of the golden palace, lady, to where we must not go. Yet, yet I will look. (*She peers.*) Yes, yes, indeed ; there stands old Aether Mountain. But he does not call. Indeed he does not call. He is all silent in Heaven.

QUEEN : It is his voice, Oozizi.

Oozizi : What, lady ? I hear no voice.

QUEEN : That great, great silence is his voice, Oozizi. He is calling me out of that blue waste of Heaven.

Oozizi : Lady, I cannot understand.

QUEEN : He calls, Oozizi.

Oozizi : Come away, lady. It is bad to look so long. Oh, if the Princes had not made their clamour heard ! Oh, if they had not you had not gone to the door and seen

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Aether Mountain, and this trouble had not come. Oh ! Oh ! Oh !

QUEEN : There is no trouble upon Aether Mountain.

Oozizi : Oh, lady, it is terrible that you should leave the palace.

QUEEN : There is no trouble there. Aether Mountain goes all calm into Heaven. His grey-blue slopes are calm as the sky about him. There he stands calling. He is calling to me, Oozizi.

Oozizi (reflecting) : Can it be ?

QUEEN : What would you ask, Oozizi ?

Oozizi : Can it be that it is with you, great lady, as it was with the Queen, your mother, when Destiny sent her hence to Aether Mountain ?

QUEEN : Aether Mountain calls.

Oozizi : Lady, for a moment hear me. Come with me but a little while.

[She leads the QUEEN slowly by the arm back to the throne.]

Lady, be seated here once more and take up the orb and sceptre in your small hands as of old.

[The QUEEN patiently does as she is told.] Now, if Destiny calls you, let him call to you as to a Queen. Now, if it be for no whim of those that pass, that you would go so far from here to that great moun-

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tain, say, seated upon your throne in the golden palace with sceptre and orb in hand, say would you go forth, lady ?

QUEEN (*almost dreaming*) : Aether Mountain calls.

[Oozizi bursts into tears. She helps the QUEEN by the arm from her throne and leads her part of the way to the door. There she stops. The QUEEN goes on to the door alone.

Oozizi : Farewell, lady.

[The QUEEN gazes out rapturously towards Aether Mountain. Then she walks back and embraces Oozizi.

QUEEN : Farewell, Oozizi.

Oozizi : Farewell, great lady.

[The QUEEN turns, then suddenly she runs swiftly and nimbly through the door and disappears.

[At once there is a murmur of voices from the Hall of the Hundred Princes.

VOICES (*off*) : Ah, ah, ah.

[Oozizi stands still weeping.

[Enter the Princes, exquisite and frivolous. They crowd past each other.

MELIFLOR : And where is our little Queen ?

[Oozizi answers with a defiant look through her tears, which has its effect on them.

MOOMOOMON (*foppishly*) : There, there.

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XIMENUNG : Gone !

MELIFLOR : Come ! Let us follow.

MOOMOOMON : Shall we ?

SEVERAL : Yes.

MOOMOOMON : Come.

[They stream across from the side door
R to the door in back, Oozizi
regarding them haughtily.

Oozizi (menacingly) : It is Aether Mountain.

[Entranced, silent, last of all Zoon follows. Exeunt all the Princes.
Sounds as of rough protest heard from
the workers off. The grim brown
heads of two or three peer round the
door by which the Princes entered.
Many come on, dumb, puzzled, turning
their brown heads, searching. At last
they cluster round Oozizi.

“Er” ? they say.

Oozizi : Aether Mountain has called her.

[They nod dumb heads gravely.

CURTAIN.

SCENE III

On the base of Aether Mountain.

Right, heather sloping up to left, which is rugged with tumbled grey rocks.

Further left all the scene is filled with the rising bulk of Aether Mountain.

Low down, far off and small in the background to the right appears a little palace of pure gold.

Enter right the QUEEN running untired and nimble, unchecked by those grey rocks.

Following her the tired PRINCES come.

ZOON is no longer last, but about fourth, and gaining.

MELIFLOR leads.

MELIFLOR : Permit me, great lady. My hand over the rocks. Permit . . .

[He falls and cannot rise.]

MOOMOOMON : Permit me. (*He falls too.*) These rocks ; it is these rocks.

XIMENUNG (*going wearily*) : Great lady. A moment. One moment, great lady. Allow me.

[But ZOON does not speak. Exeunt L. the Queen and those Princes that have not fallen. The curtain falls on stragglers crossing the stage.]

CURTAIN.

SCENE IV

The Summit.

*On the snow on the pinnacle of Aether Mountain,
with only bright blue sky all round and everywhere,
recline QUEEN ZOOMZOOMARMA and the PRINCE OF
ZOON.*

THE QUEEN : You had known no love before, First
of a Hundred ?

PRINCE OF ZOON : There is no love on earth, O
Queen of all.

QUEEN : Only here.

ZOON : Pure love is only here on this peak lonely
in heaven.

QUEEN : Would you love me elsewhere if we went
from here ?

ZOON : But we will never go from here.

QUEEN : No, we will never leave it.

ZOON : Lady, look down. (*She looks.*) The earth
is sorrowful. (*She sighs.*) Cares. Cares.
All over the wide surface we can see are
troubles ; troubles far off and grey, that
harm not Aether Mountain.

QUEEN : It looks a long way off and long ago.

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ZOON (*wonderingly*): Only to-day we came to
Aether Mountain.

QUEEN: Only to-day?

ZOON: We crossed a gulf of time.

QUEEN: It lies below us, all drowsy with years.

ZOON: Lady, here is your home, this peak that has
entered heaven. Let us never leave
your home.

QUEEN: I knew not until to-day of Aether Moun-
tain. None had told me.

ZOON: Knew you never, lady, of love?

QUEEN: None had told me.

ZOON: This is your home; not Earth; no golden
palace. Reign here alone, not knowing
the cares of men, without yesterday or
to-morrow, untroubled by history or
council.

QUEEN: Yes, yes, we will return no more.

ZOON: See, lady, see the Earth. Is it not as a
dream just faded?

QUEEN: It is dim indeed, grey and dream-like.

ZOON: It is the Earth we knew.

QUEEN: It is all dream-like.

ZOON: It is gone; we can dimly see it.

QUEEN: Was it a dream?

ZOON: Perhaps. It is gone now and does not
matter.

QUEEN: Poor Earth. I hope it was real.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

ZOON (*seizing her hand*) : Oh, Zoomzoomarma, say not you hope that Earth was real. It is gone now. See ; it is so far away. Sigh not for Earth, oh lady, sigh not for Earth.

QUEEN : Why not, King of Aether Mountain ?

ZOON : Because when you sigh for tiny things I tremble for your love. See how faint and small it is and how far away.

QUEEN : I do not sigh for Earth, King of the Mountain. I only wish it well.

ZOON : Oh, wish it not well, lady.

QUEEN : Let us wish the poor Earth well.

ZOON : No, lady, no. Be with me always wholly, living not partly in dreams. There is no Earth. It is but a dream that left us. See, see (*pointing down*) it is a dim dream.

QUEEN (*looking down*) : The people move there still. See, there is Prince Ximenung. Something down there seems almost unlike dreams.

ZOON : No, lady, it cannot be.

QUEEN : How know you, Lord of the Mountain ?

ZOON : It was too unreal for life. Love was not there. Surely it was a dream.

QUEEN : Yes, I knew not love in the golden palace of Zoorm.

ZOON : Then indeed it was unreal, Golden Lady. Forget the dream of Earth.

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QUEEN : If love be real . . .

ZOON : Can you doubt it ?

QUEEN : No. It was a dream. Just now I dreamt it. Are dreams bad, my Prince ?

ZOON : No. They are just dreams.

QUEEN : We will think of dreams no more.

ZOON : This is where love is, and here only. We should not dream too much or think of dreams, because the place is holy.

QUEEN : Is love here only, darling ?

ZOON : Here only, Golden Queen. Do any others elsewhere love as we.

QUEEN : No, I think not.

ZOON : Then how can pure love be elsewhere ?

QUEEN : It is true.

ZOON : On this clear peak that just enters Heaven love is and only here. The rest is dreams.

QUEEN : Could we awake from love and find Earth true ?

ZOON : No, no, no. Sweet Lady, let not such fancies alarm you.

QUEEN : And yet folks wake from dreams. It would be terrible.

ZOON : No, no, there are things too real for dreams. You cannot waken from love. Dreams are of fantastic things, things fanciful and weak, and things confused and intricate like Earth. When you think

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

of them in your dreams you see their unreality. But if love were not real what could there be to wake to.

QUEEN: True. How wise you are. It was but a fancy that troubled me. (*Looking down.*) It was one of those dreams at dawn. It is faint and far-off now.

ZOON: Will you love me for ever, Golden Queen?

QUEEN: For ever. Why not? You will love me for ever?

ZOON: For ever. I cannot help it.

QUEEN: Let us look at the dream far off, in the dimness our thoughts have forsaken.

ZOON: Aye, let us look. It was a sad dream somewhat; and yet upon this peak where all is love all that we see seems happy.

QUEEN: See the dream there. Look at those. They seem to walk dreamily as they walk in the dream.

ZOON: It is because they have not love, which is only here.

QUEEN: Look! Look at those dreamers in the dream.

ZOON: They are running.

QUEEN: Oh! Look!

ZOON: They are pursued.

QUEEN: The brown ones are pursuing them with spears.

ZOON: It is Prince Meliflor, Prince Moomoomon,

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

Prince Ximenung that run in the dream.
And the Prince of Huz. The brown
men are close.

QUEEN: The brown ones are overtaking them.

ZOON: Yes, they are closer.

QUEEN: Look! Prince Ximenung!

ZOON: Yes, he is dead in the dream.

QUEEN: The Prince of Huz?

ZOON: Speared.

QUEEN: Still, still they are killing them.

ZOON: It is all the Hundred Princes.

QUEEN: They are killing them all.

ZOON: A sad sight once.

QUEEN: Once?

ZOON: I should have wept once.

QUEEN: It is so far off now.

ZOON: It is so far, far off. We can only feel joy
upon this holy mountain.

QUEEN: Only joy. (*He sighs as he looks.*) Look!
(*He sighs again.*)

ZOON: There falls the poor Prince Meliflor.

QUEEN: How huge a thrust it was with the great
spear.

ZOON: He is dead.

QUEEN: Are you not happy?

ZOON: Yes.

QUEEN: In your voice there seemed to sound some

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

far-off thing. Some strange thing. Was it sorrow ?

ZOON : No ; we are too high ; sorrow cannot come. No grief can touch us here, no woe drift up to us from the woes of Earth.

QUEEN : I thought there was some strange thing in your voice, like sorrows we have dreamed.

ZOON : No, Golden Queen. Those fancied sorrows of dreams cannot touch reality.

QUEEN : You will never be sorry we have woken and left the dream of Earth ?

ZOON : No, glorious lady ; nothing can bring me trouble ever again.

QUEEN : Not even I ?

ZOON : Never you, my Golden Zoomzoomarma, for on this sacred peak where there is only love you cannot.

QUEEN : We will dwell here for ever in endless joy.

ZOON (*looking down*) : All dead now, all the Princes.

QUEEN : Turn, my Prince, from the dream of Earth, lest trouble come up from it.

ZOON : It cannot drift up here ; yet we will turn from the dream.

QUEEN : Let us think of endless joy upon the edge of heaven.

ZOON : Yes, Queen ; for ever in reality while all else dream away.

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

QUEEN : It is the years that make them drowsy.
They dream to dream the years away.
Time cannot reach so high as here, the
years are far below us.

ZOON : Far below us, making a dream and troubling
it.

QUEEN : They do not know in the dream that only
love is real.

ZOON : If time could reach us here we should pass,
too. Nothing is real where time is.

QUEEN : How shall we spend the calm that time
does not vex, together here for ever ?

ZOON : Holding your hand. (*She gives it.*) And
kissing it often in the calm of eternity.
Sometimes watching, a moment, the
dream go by ; then kissing your hand
again all in eternity.

QUEEN : And never wearying ?

ZOON : Not while eternity lingers here in heaven.

QUEEN : Thus we will live until the dream goes by
and Earth has faded under Aether
Mountain.

ZOON : And then we shall watch the calm of
Eternity.

QUEEN : And you will still kiss my hand at times.

ZOON : Yes, while eternity wiles Heaven away.

QUEEN : The silence is like music on Aether
Mountain.

ZOON : It is because all is real. In the dream

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nothing was real. Music had to be made and then soon passed trembling away. Here all things always are as the desire of Earth, Earth's desire that groped among fantasies finding them false.

QUEEN : Let us forget the dream.

ZOON (*kissing her hand*) : I have forgotten for ever.

QUEEN : Ah !

ZOON : What trouble has drifted up to you from Earth ?

QUEEN : An old saying.

ZOON : It was said in the dream.

QUEEN : It was true !

[*She snatches her hand away.*

Ah, I remember it. It was true.

ZOON : All is unreal but love, my crownéd Zoom-zoomarma. Where there was not love it cannot have been true.

[*He tries to take her hand again.*

QUEEN : Touch not my hand. It was true.

ZOON : What was the saying heard in the dream of Earth that was true ?

QUEEN : None is worthy to touch my hand ; no, none.

ZOON : By Aether Mountain, I will kiss your hand again ! What is this saying out of a dream that dares deny reality ?

THE FLIGHT OF THE QUEEN

QUEEN : It is true ! Oh, it is true !

ZOON : Out of that hurried, aimless dream, that knows not its own end even, you have brought me a saying and say it against love.

QUEEN : I say it is true !

ZOON : Nothing is true against love. Fate only is greater.

QUEEN : Then it is Fate.

ZOON : Against Fate I will kiss your hand again.

QUEEN : None are worthy. No, none.

[*She draws her rapier.*

ZOON : I will kiss your hand again.

QUEEN : It must be this (*pointing with rapier*) for none are worthy.

ZOON : Though it be death I kiss your hand again.

QUEEN : It is certain death.

ZOON : Oh, Zoomzoomarma, forget that troubled dream, and things said by dreamers, while I kiss your hand in heaven if only once again.

QUEEN : None are worthy. It is death. None are worthy. None.

ZOON : Though it be death, yet once again upon Aether Mountain in heaven I kiss your hand.

QUEEN : Away ! It is death. Upon the word of a Queen.

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Zoon : I kiss your h . . .

[She standing kills him kneeling. He falls off Aether Mountain, behind it out of sight.

[As he falls he calls her name after intervals. She kneels upon the summit and watches him falling, falling, falling.

[Fainter and fainter as he falls from that tremendous height comes up her name as he calls it.

Zoomzoomarma ! Zoomzoomarma !
Zoomzoomarma !

[Still she is watching and he is falling still.

[At last when his cry of ZOOMZOOMARMA comes almost unheard to that incredible height and then is heard no more, she turns, and with infinite neatness picking up her skirts steps down daintily over the snow.

[She is going Earthward as the curtain falls.

CURTAIN.

CHEEZO

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

SLADDER, *a successful man.*

SPLURGE, *his secretary and publicity agent.*

THE REV. CHARLES HIPPANTHIGH.

BUTLER.

MRS. SLADDER.

ERMYNTRUDE SLADDER.

CHEEZO

Scene: The big house that SLADDER has bought in the country. SLADDER's study. Large French window opening on to a lawn.

Time: Now.

SLADDER's daughter is seated in an armchair tapping on the arm of it a little impatiently.

The door opens very cautiously, and the head of MRS. SLADDER is put round it.

MRS. SLADDER: O, Ermyntrude. Whatever are you doing here?

ERMYNTRUDE: I wanted to speak to father, mother.

MRS. SLADDER: But you mustn't come in here. We mustn't disturb father.

ERMYNTRUDE: I want to speak to father.

MRS. SLADDER: Whatever about, Ermyntrude?

ERMYNTRUDE (*taps the arm of the chair*): O, nothing, mother. Only about that idea of his.

MRS. SLADDER: What idea, child?

ERMYNTRUDE: O, that idea he had, that—er—I was some day to marry a duke.

MRS. SLADDER: And why shouldn't you marry a

CHEEZO

duke, child ? I am sure father would make it worth his while.

ERMYNTRUDE : O well, I don't think I want to, mother.

MRS. SLADDER : But why not, Ermyntrude ?

ERMYNTRUDE : O well, you know Mr. Jones——

MRS. SLADDER : That good man !

ERMYNTRUDE : ——did say that dukes were no good, mother. They oppress the poor, I think he said.

MRS. SLADDER : Very true.

ERMYNTRUDE : Well, there you are.

MRS. SLADDER : Yes, yes, of course. At the same time, father had rather set his heart on it. You wouldn't have any other reason now, child, would you ?

ERMYNTRUDE : What more do you want, mother ?

Mr. Jones is a Cabinet Minister ; he must know what he's talking about.

MRS. SLADDER : Yes, yes.

ERMYNTRUDE : And I hear he's going to get a peerage.

MRS. SLADDER (*with enthusiasm*) : Well, I'm sure he deserves it. But child, you mustn't talk to father to-day. You mustn't stay here any longer.

ERMYNTRUDE : But why not, mother ?

MRS. SLADDER : Well, child, he's been smoking one of those big cigars again, and he's absent-

CHEEZO

like. And he's been talking a good deal with Mr. Splurge. It's one of his great days, I think, Ermyntrude. I feel sure it is. One of those days that has given us all this money, and all these fine houses, with all those little birds that his gentlemen friends shoot. He has an idea !

ERMYNTRUDE : O, mother, do you really think so ?

MRS. SLADDER : I'm sure of it, child. (*Looking out.*)

There ! There he is ! Walking along that path that they made. I can see he's got an idea. How like Napoleon.* He's walking with Mr. Splurge. They're coming in now. Come along, Ermyntrude, we mustn't disturb him to-day. He has some great idea, some great idea.

ERMYNTRUDE : How splendid, mother ! What do you think it is ?

MRS. SLADDER : Ah. I could never explain it to you, even if I knew. It is business, child, business. It isn't everybody that can understand business.

ERMYNTRUDE : I hear them coming, mother.

MRS. SLADDER : There must be things we can never understand : things too deep for us like. And business is the most wonderful of them all.

[*Exeunt R.*

* (N.B.—SLADDER is not in the very least like Napoleon.)

CHEEZO

[Enter SLADDER and SPLURGE through the window, which opens on to the lawn, down a step or two.

SLADDER : Now, Splurge, we must do some business.

SPLURGE : Yes, sir.

SLADDER : Sit down, Splurge.

SPLURGE : Thank you, sir.

SLADDER : Splurge, I am going to say to you now, what I couldn't talk about with all those gardeners hanging about. And, by the way, Splurge, haven't we bought rather too many gardeners ?

SPLURGE : No, sir. The Earl of Etheldune has seven ; we had to go one better than him, sir.

SLADDER : Certainly, Splurge, certainly.

SPLURGE : So I bought ten for you, sir, to be on the safe side.

SLADDER : Ah, quite right, Splurge, quite right. There seemed to be rather a lot, but that's quite right. Well, now to business.

SPLURGE : Yes, sir.

SLADDER : I told you I'd invented a new name for a food.

SPLURGE : Yes, sir. Cheezo.

SLADDER : Well, what have you been able to do about it ?

SPLURGE : I've had some nice little posters done, sir. I'm having it well written up. I've

CHEEZO

got some samples here, and it looks like doing very well indeed.

SLADDER : Ah !

SPLURGE : It's a grand name, if I may say so, sir. It sounds so classical-like with that "O" at the end ; and yet anyone can see what it's derived from, even if he's never learnt anything. It suggests cheese to them every time.

SLADDER : Let's see your samples.

SPLURGE : Well, sir, here's one. (*Brings paper from pocket. Reads.*) "What is Cheezo ? Go where you may, speak with whom you will, the same question confronts you. Cheezo is the great new—"

SLADDER : No, Splurge. Cut that question bit. We must have no admission on our part that there's anyone who doesn't know what Cheezo is. Cut it.

SPLURGE : You're quite right, sir ; you're quite right. That's a weak bit. I'll cut it. (*He scratches it out. Reads.*) "Cheezo is the great new food. It builds up body and brain."

SLADDER : That's good.

SPLURGE : "There is a hundred times more lactic fluid in an ounce of Cheezo than in a gallon of milk."

SLADDER : What's lactic fluid, Splurge ?

SPLURGE : I don't know, sir, but it's good stuff all

CHEEZO

right. It's the right thing to have in it.
It's a good man that I got to write this.

SLADDER : All right. Go on.

SPLURGE : "Cheezo makes darling baby grow."

SLADDER : Good. Very good. Very good indeed,
Splurge.

SPLURGE : Yes, I think that catches them, sir.

SLADDER : Go on.

SPLURGE : "Cheezo. The only food."

SLADDER : "The only food" ? I don't like that.

SPLURGE : It will go down all right, sir, so long as
the posters are big enough.

SLADDER : Go down all right ! I wasn't fool
enough to suppose that it wouldn't go
down all right. What are posters for if
the public doesn't believe them ? Of
course it will go *down* all right.

SPLURGE : O, I beg your pardon, sir. Then what
don't you quite like about it ?

SLADDER : I might invent another food one of these
days, and then where should we be ?

SPLURGE : I hadn't thought of that, sir.

SLADDER : Out with it.

SPLURGE : (*Scratches with pencil*). "Cheezo is made
out of the purest milk from purest
English cows."

SLADDER : Y-e-s, y-e-s. I don't say you're wrong.
I don't say you're exactly wrong. But
in business, Splurge, you want to keep

CHEEZO

more to generalities. Talk about the bonds that bind the Empire, talk about the Union Jack, talk by all means about the purity of the English cow; but definite statements you know, definite statements—

SPLURGE: O, yes, I know, sir; but the police never interfere with anything one puts on a poster. It would be bad for business, a jury would never convict, and—

SLADDER: I didn't say they would; but if some interfering ass were to write to the papers to say that Cheezo wasn't made from milk, we should have to go to the expense of buying a dozen cows, and photographing them, and one thing and another. (*He gets up and goes to cupboard.*) Now, look here. I quite understand what you say, purity and all that, and a very good point too, but you look at this.

[He unrolls a huge poster representing a dairymaid smirking in deadly earnest. On it is printed: "WON'T YOU HAVE SOME?" and on another part of the poster "CHEEZO FOR PURITY."]

You see. Your whole point's there. We state nothing and we can make the dairymaid as suggestive as we like.

SPLURGE: Yes, sir, that is excellent. Quite splendid.

CHEEZO

SLADDER : They shall look at that on every road and railway, where it enters every town in England. I'll have it on the cliffs of Dover. It shall be the first thing they see when they come back home, and the last thing for them to remember when they leave England. I'll have it everywhere. I'll rub their noses in it. And then, Splurge, they'll ask for Cheezo when they want cheese, and that will mean I shall have the monopoly of all the cheese in the world.

SPLURGE : You're a great man, sir.

SLADDER : I'll be a greater one, Splurge. I'm not past work yet. What more have you got?

SPLURGE : I've rather a nice little poster being done, sir. A boy and a girl looking at one another with a rather knowing look. There's a large query mark all over the girl's dress. Then over the top in big letters I've put : "What is the secret ?" and in smaller letters : "I've got a bit of Cheezo." It *makes* people look at it, the children's faces are so wicked.

SLADDER : Good, Splurge. Very good. I'll have that one. I'll rub their noses in that one.

SPLURGE : Then I've got some things for the Press.
(Reads.) "She : 'Darling.' He : 'Yes, wifey.' She : 'You won't forget, darling.' He : 'No, wifey.' She : 'You won't

CHEEZO

forget to bring me some of that excellent Cheezo, so nutritious, so nice for darling baby, to be had at all grocers ; but be sure that you find the name of Sladder on their well-known pink wrappers.' He : ' Certainly, wifey.' " Just the usual thing, sir, of course ; only I have a very good little picture to go with it, very suggestive indeed ; I've made all the arrangements with the Press and the bill-posters, sir. I think we'll make a big thing of it, sir.

SLADDER : Well, Splurge, nothing remains to be done now, except to make the Cheezo.

SPLURGE : How do you think of doing it, sir ?

SLADDER : Do you know how they kill pigs in Chicago ? No, you've not travelled yet. Well, they get their pigs on a slide, one man cuts their throats as fast as they go by, another shaves their bristles, and so on, and so on ; one man for each job, and all at it at once ; they do it very expeditiously. Well, there's an interfering fellow sent there by the Government (we wouldn't stand him in England), and if a pig has a sign of tuberculosis on him he won't let that pig go down. Now you'd think that pig was wasted. He isn't. He goes into soap. Now, Splurge, how many cakes of soap were used in the world last year ?

CHEEZO

SPLURGE (*getting up*) : Last year ? I don't think we have the figures in for last year yet, sir.

[*He goes to bookshelf.*

SLADDER : Well, the year before will do.

SPLURGE (*taking book and turning pages*) : The figures are given, I think, sir, from the 1st of March to the 1st of March.

SLADDER : That will do.

SPLURGE : Ah, here it is, sir. Soap statistics for the twelve months ending 1st of March this year. A hundred and four million users, using on an average twenty cakes each per year. Then there are partial users, and occasional users. The total would be about twenty-one hundred million, sir.

SLADDER : Pure waste, Splurge, all pure waste.

SPLURGE : Waste, sir ?

SLADDER : Pure waste. What do you suppose becomes of all that soap, all that good fat? Proteids, I think they call 'em. And proteids are *good* for you, Splurge.

SPLURGE : What *becomes* of them, sir ? They're used up.

SLADDER : No, Splurge. They disappear, I grant you. They float away. But they're still there Splurge, they're still there. All that good fat is somewhere.

SPLURGE : But—but, sir—but—in the drains, sir ?

CHEEZO

SLADDER : All those million of cakes of soap. There must be tons of it, Splurge. And we'll get it.

SPLURGE : You are a wonderful man, sir.

SLADDER : O, I've a few brains, Splurge. That anyone might have. But I use mine, that's all. There's cleverer people than me in the world—

SPLURGE : No, sir.

SLADDER : O, yes, there are. Lots of them. But they're damned fools. And why? 'Cause they don't use their brains. They mess about learning Greek. Greek! Can you believe it? What good does Greek ever do them? . . . But the money's not made yet, Splurge.

SPLURGE : I'm having it well advertised, sir.

SLADDER : Not so fast. What if they won't eat it?

SPLURGE : O, they'll eat it all right when it's advertised, sir. They eat everything that's advertised.

SLADDER : What if they can't eat it, Splurge?

SPLURGE : Can't, sir?

SLADDER : Send for my daughter.

SPLURGE : Yes, sir. (*He rises and goes to the door.*)

SLADDER : The battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of some damned place. A million of money will be won or lost in this house in five minutes.

CHEEZO

SPLURGE : In this house, sir ?

SLADDER : Yes, in Ermyntrude's sitting-room. Send for her.

SPLURGE : Yes, sir. Yes, sir. Miss Sladder ! Miss Sladder !

ERMYNTRUDE (*off*) : Yes, Mr. Splurge.

SPLURGE : Would you come to the study, miss, Mr. Sladder wants to speak to you.

ERMYNTRUDE : O, yes, Mr. Splurge.

SLADDER : The test ! The test !

[*Re-enter SPLURGE.*

SPLURGE : Miss Sladder is coming, sir.

SLADDER : The test !

[*Enter ERMYNTRUDE.*

ERMYNTRUDE : What is it, father ?

SLADDER : How are your white mice, child ?

ERMYNTRUDE : Quite well, father, both of them.

SLADDER (*draws a box from his pocket, takes out a little bit of cheese*) : Give them that, Ermyntrude.

ERMYNTRUDE : That, father. What is it ?

SLADDER : Cheese.

ERMYNTRUDE : May I have a bit ?

SLADDER : No, don't touch it !

ERMYNTRUDE : Very well, father.

SLADDER : If they eat it, you shall have——

ERMYNTRUDE : What, father ?

SLADDER : Anything, everything. Only go and give them the cheese.

CHEEZO

ERMYNTRUDE : All right, father.

[*She moves to the door R., she looks round, then goes out by the French window instead.*

SLADDER : Why are you going that way, child ?

ERMYNTRUDE : O—er—I thought it would be nice to go round over the lawn, father. I can get in by the drawing-room.

SLADDER : O, very well. Be quick, dear.

ERMYNTRUDE : All right, father.

[*The magnet that has attracted ERMYNTRUDE to the lawn now appears in the form of MR. HIPPANTHIGH, passing the window on his way to the hall-door. SLADDER and SPLURGE do not see him, having their backs to the window. ERMYNTRUDE looks round now and then to be sure of this. They hold hands longer than is laid down as necessary in books upon etiquette under the head of visiting. She gives him a look of glad and hopeful interrogation but he shakes his head solemnly, and passes gravely on, as one whose errand is no cheerful duty. She looks after him, then goes her way.*

SLADDER : Well, Splurge, we can only wait. (*With emphasis.*) If these mice eat it——

SPLURGE : Yes, sir ?

SLADDER : The public will eat it.

CHEEZO

SPLURGE : Ah !

SLADDER : Any other business to-day ?

SPLURGE : O, only the cook, sir. He's complaining about the vegetables, sir. He says he's never been anywhere before where they didn't buy them. We get them out of the kitchen garden here, and it seems he doesn't understand it. Says he won't serve a greengrocer, sir.

SLADDER : A kitchen garden is the wrong thing, is it ?

SPLURGE : He says so, sir.

SLADDER : But there was one here when we came.

SPLURGE : O, only country people, sir. I suppose they didn't know any better.

SLADDER : Well, where do people grow vegetables, then ?

SPLURGE : I asked the cook that, sir, and he said they don't grow them, they buy them.

SLADDER : O, all right, then. Let him buy them, then. We must do the right thing.

[*The hall-door bell rings.*

SLADDER : Hullo ! Who's ringing my bell ?

SPLURGE : That was the hall-door, wasn't it, sir ?

SLADDER : Yes. What are they ringing it for ?

[*Enter BUTLER.*

BUTLER : Mr. Hippanthigh has called to see you, sir.

SLADDER : Called to see me ! What about ?

CHEEZO

BUTLER : He didn't inform me, sir.

SLADDER : I say, Splurge, have I got to see him ?

SPLURGE : I think so, sir. I think they call on one another like that in the country.

SLADDER : Good lord, whatever for ? (*To BUTLER.*)
O, yes. I'll see him, I'll see him.

BUTLER : Very good, sir, I'll inform him so, sir.

[*Exit.*]

SLADDER : I say, Splurge, I suppose I've got to have a butler, and all that, eh ?

SPLURGE : O, yes, sir. One at least. It's quite necessary.

SLADDER : You—you couldn't have bought me a cheerfuller one now, could you ?

SPLURGE : I'm afraid not, sir. If you were to take all this too lightheartedly, the other landowners would hardly like it, you know.

SLADDER : O, well ! O, well ! What kind of man is this Hippanthigh that's coming ?

SPLURGE : He's the man that quarrels with the bishop, sir.

SLADDER : O, the curate. O, yes. I've heard about him. He's been here before, I think. Lawn tennis.

[*Enter BUTLER.*]

BUTLER : Mr. Hippanthigh, sir.

[*Enter HIPPANTHIGH.* *Exit BUTLER.*]

CHEEZO

SLADDER : How do you do, Mr. Hippanthigh ?
How do you do ? Pleased to see you.

HIPPANTHIGH : I wished to speak with you, Mr.
Sladder, if you will permit me.

SLADDER : Certainly, Mr. Hippanthigh, certainly.
Take a chair.

HIPPANTHIGH : Thank you, sir. I think I would
sooner stand.

SLADDER : Please yourself. Please yourself.

HIPPANTHIGH : I wished to speak with you alone, sir.

SLADDER : Alone, eh ? Alone ? (*Aside to SPLURGE.*)
It's usual, eh ? (*To HIPPANTHIGH.*)
Alone, of course, yes. You've come to
call, haven't you. (*Exit SPLURGE.*) Can
I offer you—er, er—calling's not much
in my line, you know—but what I mean
is—will you have a bottle of champagne ?

HIPPANTHIGH : Mr. Sladder, I've come to speak with
you because I believe it to be my duty
to do so. I have hesitated to come, but
when for particular reasons it became
most painful to me to do so, then I
knew that it was my clear duty, and I
have come.

SLADDER : O, yes, what they call a duty call. O, yes,
quite so. Yes, exactly.

HIPPANTHIGH : [Mr. Sladder, many of my parishioners
are acquainted with the thing that you
sell as bread. (*From the moment of*
HIPPANTHIGH's entry till now SLADDER,

CHEEZO

over-cheerful and anxious, has been struggling to do and say the right thing through all the complications of a visit; but now that the note of Business has been sounded he suddenly knows where he is and becomes alert and stern, and all there.)

SLADDER : What ? Virilo ?

HIPPANTHIGH : Yes. They pay more for it than they pay for bread, because they've been taught somehow, poor fools, that "they must have the best." They've been made to believe that it makes them, what they call virile, poor fools, and they're growing ill on it. Not so ill that I can prove anything, and the doctor daren't help me.

SLADDER : Are you aware, Mr. Hippanthigh, that if you said in public what you're saying to me, you would go to prison for it, unless you can run to the very heavy fine —damages would be enormous.

HIPPANTHIGH : I know that, Mr. Sladder, and so I have come to you as the last hope for my people.

SLADDER : Are you aware, Mr. Hippanthigh, that you are making an attack upon business ? I don't say that business is as pure as a surplice. But I do say that in business it is—as you may not understand—get on or go under ; and without my

CHEEZO

business, or the business of the next man, who is doing his best to beat me, what would happen to trade ? I don't know what's going to happen to England if you get rid of her trade, Mr. Hippanthigh. . . . Well ? . . . When we're broke because we've been doing business with surplices on, what are the other countries going to do, Mr. Hippanthigh ? Can you answer me that ?

HIPPANTHIGH : No, Mr. Sladder.

SLADDER : Ah ! So I've got the best of you ?

HIPPANTHIGH : Yes, Mr. Sladder. I'm not so clever as you.

SLADDER : Glad you admit the point. As for cleverness it isn't that I've so much of that, but I use what I've got. Well, have you anything more to say ?

HIPPANTHIGH : Only to appeal to you, Mr. Sladder, on behalf of these poor people.

SLADDER : Why. But you admitted one must have business, and that it can't be run like a tea-party. What more do you want ?

HIPPANTHIGH : I want you to spare them, Mr. Sladder.

SLADDER : Spare them ? Spare them ? Why, what's the matter with them ? I'm not killing them.

HIPPANTHIGH : No, Mr. Sladder, you're not killing them. The mortality among children's

CHEEZO

a bit on the high side, but I wouldn't say that was entirely due to your bread. There's a good many minor ailments among the grown-up people, it seems to attack their digestion mostly, one can't trace each case to its source; but their health and their teeth aren't what they were when they had the pure wheaten bread.

SLADDER: But there *is* wheat in my bread, prepared by a special process.

HIPPANTHIGH: Ah! It's that special process that does it, I expect.

SLADDER: Well, they needn't buy it if it isn't good.

HIPPANTHIGH: Ah, they can't help themselves, poor fools; they've been taught to do it from their childhood up. Virilo, Bredo and Weeto, that are all so much better than bread, it's a choice between these three. Bread is never advertised, or God's good wheat.

SLADDER: Mr. Hippanthigh, if I'm too much of a fool to sell my goods I suffer for it; if they're such fools as to buy my Virilo, they suffer for it—that is to say, you say they do—that is a natural law that may be new to you. But why should I suffer more than them? Besides, if I take my Virilo off the market just to oblige you, Mr. Hippanthigh, a little matter of £30,000 a year—

CHEEZO

HIPPANTHIGH : I—er—

SLADDER : O, don't mention it. Any little trifle to oblige ! But if I did, up would go the sales of Bredo and Weeto (which have nothing to do with my firm), and your friends wouldn't be any better for that let me tell you, for I happen to know how *they're* made.

HIPPANTHIGH : I am not speaking of the wickedness of others. I come to appeal to you, Mr. Sladder, that for nothing that *you* do, our English race shall lose anything of its ancient strength, in its young men in their prime, or that they should grow infirm a day sooner than God intended, when He planned his course for man.

ERMYNTRUDE (*off*) : Father ! Father !

[SLADDER draws himself up, and stands erect to meet the decisive news that he has expected.

[Enter ERMYNTRUDE.

ERMYNTRUDE : Father ! The mice have eaten the cheese.

SLADDER : Ah ! The public will— O ! (*He has suddenly seen HIPPANTHIGH*).

HIPPANTHIGH (*solemnly*) : What new wickedness is this, Mr. Sladder ? (*All stand silent.*) Good-bye, Mr. Sladder.

[*He goes to the door, passing ERMYNTRUDE. He looks at her and sighs as*

CHEEZO

he goes. He passes MRS. SLADDER near the door, and bows in silence.

[Exit.]

ERMYNTRUDE: What have you been saying to Mr. Hippanthigh, father?

SLADDER: Saying! He's been doing all the saying. He doesn't let you do much saying, does Hippanthigh.

ERMYNTRUDE: But, father. What did he come to see you about?

SLADDER: He came to call your poor old father all kinds of bad names, he did. It seems your old father is a wicked fellow, Ermyntrude.

ERMYNTRUDE: O, father, I'm sure he never meant it.

[HIPPANTHIGH goes by the window with a mournful face. ERMYNTRUDE runs to the window and watches him till he is out of sight. She quietly waves her hand to HIPPANTHIGH, unseen by her father.

SLADDER: O, he meant it all right. He meant it. I'm sorry for that bishop of his that he quarrels with, if he lets him have it the way he went for your poor old father. O, dear me; dear me.

ERMYNTRUDE: I don't think he quarrels with him, father. I think he only insists that there can be no such thing as eternal punishment. I think that's rather nice of him.

CHEEZO

SLADDER : I don't care a damn about eternal punishment one way or the other. But a man who quarrels with the head of his firm's a fool. If his bishop's keen on hell, he should push hell for all it's worth.

ERMYNTRUDE : Y-e-s, I suppose he should. But, father, aren't you glad that my mice have eaten the new cheese ? I thought you'd be glad, father.

SLADDER : So I am, child. So I am. Only I don't feel quite so glad as I thought I was going to, now. I don't know why. He seems to have stroked me the wrong way somehow.

ERMYNTRUDE : You said you'd give me whatever I liked.

SLADDER : And so I will, child. So I will. A motor if you like, with chauffeur and footman complete. We can buy anything now, and I wouldn't grudge—

ERMYNTRUDE : I don't want a motor, father.

SLADDER : What would you like to have ?

ERMYNTRUDE : O, nothing, father, nothing. Only about that duke, father—

SLADDER : What duke, Ermyntrude ?

ERMYNTRUDE : Mother said you wanted me to marry a duke some day, father.

SLADDER : Well ?

ERMYNTRUDE : Well I—er—I don't think I quite want to, father.

CHEEZO

SLADDER : Ah ! Quite so. Quite so. Quite so.
And who *did* you think of marrying ?

ERMYNTRUDE : O, father.

SLADDER : Well ? (ERMYNTRUDE *is silent.*) When
I was his age, I had to work hard for
my living.

ERMYNTRUDE : O, father. How do you know what
age he is ?

SLADDER : O, I guessed he was 82, going to be 83
next birthday. But I daresay I know
nothing of the world. I daresay I may
have been wrong.

ERMYNTRUDE : O, father, he's young.

SLADDER : Dear me, you don't say so. Dear me,
you do surprise me. Well, well, well,
well. We do live and learn. Don't we ?
And what might his name be now ?

ERMYNTRUDE : It's Mr. Hippanthigh, father.

SLADDER : O-o-o ! It's Mr. Hippanthigh, is it ?
O-ho, O-ho ! (*He touches a movable bell,*
shouting "SPLURGE!" To his daughter
or rather to himself.) We'll see Mr.
Hippanthigh.

ERMYNTRUDE : What are you going to do, father ?

SLADDER : We'll see Mr. Hippanthigh. (*Enter*
SPLURGE.) Splurge, run after Mr. Hip-
panthigh and bring him back. Say I've
got something to say to him. He's gone
that way. Quick !

SPLURGE : Yes, sir.

[Exit.]

CHEEZO

SLADDER : I've got something to say to *him* this time.

ERMYNTRUDE : Father ! What are you going to do ?

SLADDER : I'm going to give him What For.

ERMYNTRUDE : But why, father ?

SLADDER : Because he's been giving it to your poor old father.

ERMYNTRUDE : Father—

SLADDER : Well ?

ERMYNTRUDE : Be kind to him, father.

SLADDER : O, *I'll* be kind to him. *I'll* be *kind* to him. Just you wait. *I'll* be *kind* to him !

ERMYNTRUDE : But you wouldn't send him away, father. Father, for my sake you wouldn't do that ?

SLADDER : O, we haven't *come* to that yet.

ERMYNTRUDE : But, but—you've sent for him.

SLADDER : O, I've sent for him to give him What For. We'll come to the rest later.

ERMYNTRUDE : But, when you do come to it, father.

SLADDER : Why, when we do come to it, if the young man's any good, *I'll* not stand in my daughter's way—

ERMYNTRUDE : O, thank you, father.

SLADDER : And if he's no good (*firmly*) *I'll* protect my child from him.

ERMYNTRUDE : But, father, I don't want to be protected.

CHEEZO

SLADDER : If a man's a man, he must be some good at something. Well, this man's chosen the clergyman job. I've nothing against the job, it's well enough paid at the top, but is this young man ever going to get there ? Is he ever going to get off the bottom rung ? How long has he been a curate ?

ERMYNTRUDE : Eight years, father.

SLADDER : It's a long time.

ERMYNTRUDE : But, father, he would get a vicarage if it wasn't for the bishop. The bishop stands in his way. It isn't nice of him.

SLADDER : If I'd quarrelled with the head of my firm when I was his age, you wouldn't be getting proposals from a curate ; no such luck. The dustman would have been more in your line.

ERMYNTRUDE : But, father, he doesn't quarrel with the bishop. His conscience doesn't let him believe in eternal punishment, and so he speaks straight out. I do admire him so for it. He knows that if he was silent he'd have had a good living long ago.

SLADDER : The wife of the head of my firm believed in spirit rapping. Did I go and tell her what an old fool she was ? No, I brought her messages from another world as regular as a postman.

[*Steps are heard outside the window.*

CHEEZO

SLADDER : Run along, my dear, now.

ERMYNTRUDE : Very well, father.

SLADDER : The man that's going to look after my daughter must be able to look after himself. Otherwise *I* will, till a better man comes.

[*Exit ERMYNTRUDE.* HIPPANTHIGH
and SPLURGE appear at the window.
HIPPANTHIGH enters and SPLURGE
moves away.]

HIPPANTHIGH : You sent for me, Mr. Sladder ?

SLADDER : Y-e-s—y-e-s. Take a chair. Now, Mr. Hippanthigh, I haven't often been told off the way you told me off.

HIPPANTHIGH : I felt it to be my duty, Mr. Sladder.

SLADDER : Yes, quite so. Exactly. Well, it seems I'm a thoroughly bad old man, only fit to rob the poor, an out-and-out old ruffian.

HIPPANTHIGH : I never said that.

SLADDER : No. But you made me feel it. I never felt so bad about myself before, not as bad as that. But you, Mr. Hippanthigh, you were the high-falutin' angel with a new brass halo, out on its bank holiday. Now, how would clandestine love-making strike you, Mr. Hippanthigh ? Would that be all right to your way of thinking ?

HIPPANTHIGH : Clandestine, Mr. Sladder ? I hardly understand you.

CHEEZO

SLADDER : I understand that you have been making love to my daughter.

HIPPANTHIGH : I admit it.

SLADDER : Well, I haven't heard you say anything about it to me before. Did you tell her mother ?

HIPPANTHIGH : Er—no.

SLADDER : Perhaps you told me. Very likely I've forgotten it.

HIPPANTHIGH : No.

SLADDER : Well, who *did* you tell ?

HIPPANTHIGH : We—we hadn't told anyone yet.

SLADDER : Well, I think clandestine's the word for it, Mr. Hippanthigh. I haven't had time in my life to bother about the exact meanings of words or any nonsense of that sort, but I think clandestine's about the word for it.

HIPPANTHIGH : It's a hard word, Mr. Sladder.

SLADDER : May be. And who began using hard words ? You came here and made me out a pickpocket, just because I use a few tasty little posters which sell my goods, and all the while you're trying on the sly to take a poor old man's daughter away from him. Well, Mr. Hippanthigh ?

HIPPANTHIGH : I—I never looked at it in that light before, Mr. Sladder. I never thought

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of it in that way. You have made me feel ashamed (*he lowers his head*), ashamed.

SLADDER : Aha ! Aha ! I thought I would. Now you know what it's like when you make people ashamed of themselves. You don't like it when they do it to you. Aha ! (*SLADDER is immensely pleased with himself.*)

HIPPANTHIGH : Mr. Sladder, I spoke to you as my conscience demanded, and you have shown me that I have done wrong in not speaking sooner about our engagement. I would have spoken to you, but I could not say that and the other thing in the same day. I meant to tell you soon ;—well, I didn't, and I know it looks bad. I've done wrong and I admit it.

SLADDER : Aha ! (*Still hugely pleased.*)

HIPPANTHIGH : But, Mr. Sladder, you would not on that account perhaps spoil your daughter's happiness, and take a terrible revenge on me. You would not withhold your consent to our——

SLADDER : Wait a moment ; we're coming to that. There's some bad animal that I've heard of that lives in France, and when folks attack it it defends itself. I've just been defending myself. I think I've shown

CHEEZO

you that you're no brand-new extra-gilt angel on the top of a spire.

HIPPANTHIGH : O—I—er—never—

SLADDER : Quite so. Well, now we come on to the other part. Very well. Those lords and people, they marry one another's daughters, because they know they're all no good. They're afraid it will get out like, and spread some of their damned mediæval ideas where they'll do harm. So they keep it in the family like. But we people who have had the sense to look after ourselves, we don't throw our daughters away to any young man that can't look after himself. See ?

HIPPANTHIGH : I assure you, Mr. Sladder, I should
—er—

SLADDER : She's my only daughter, and if any of my grandchildren are going to the work-house, they'll go to one where the master's salary is high, and they'll go there as master.

HIPPANTHIGH : I am aware, Mr. Sladder, that I have very little money ; as you would look at it, very little.

SLADDER : It isn't the amount of money you've got as matters. The question is this : are you a young man as money is any good to ? If I died and left you a million, would you know what to do with it ? I've met men what wouldn't

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last more than six weeks on a million. Then they'd starve if nobody gave them another million. I'm not going to give my daughter to one of that sort.

HIPPANTHIGH : I was third in the classical tripos at Cambridge, Mr. Sladder.

SLADDER : I don't give a damn for classics ; and I don't give a damn for Cambridge ; and I don't know what a tripos is. But all I can tell you is that if I was fool enough to waste my time with classics, third wouln't be good enough for me. No, Mr. Hippanthigh, you've chosen the church as your job, and I've nothing to say against your choice ; its a free country, and I've nothing to say against your job ; it's well enough paid at the top, only you don't look like getting there. I chose business as my job, there seemed more sense in it ; but if I'd chosen the Church, I shouldn't have stuck as a curate. No, nor a bishop either. I wouldn't have had an archbishop bally-ragging me and ordering me about. No. I'd have got to the top, and drawn big pay, and *spent* it.

HIPPANTHIGH : But, Mr. Sladder, I could be a vicar to-morrow if my conscience would allow me to cease protesting against a certain point which the bishop holds to be—

SLADDER : I know all about that. I don't care

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what it is that keeps you on the bottom rung of the ladder. Conscience, you say. Well, it's a different thing with every man. It's conscience with some, drink with others, sheer stupidity with most. It's pretty crowded already, that bottom rung, without me going and putting my daughter on it. Where do you suppose I'd be now if I'd let my conscience get in my way ? Eh ?

HIPPANTHIGH : Mr. Sladder, I cannot alter my beliefs.

SLADDER : Nobody asks you to. I only ask you to leave the bishop alone. He says one thing and you preach another whenever you get half a chance ; it's enough to break up any firm.

HIPPANTHIGH : Believing as I do that eternal punishment is incompatible with—

SLADDER : Now, Mr. Hippanthigh, that's got to stop. I don't mind saying, now that I've given you What For, that you don't seem a bad young fellow : but my daughter's not going to marry on the bottom rung, and there's an end of that.

HIPPANTHIGH : But, Mr. Sladder, can you bring yourself to believe in anything so terrible as eternal punishment, so contrary to—

SLADDER : Me ? No.

HIPPANTHIGH : Then, how can you ask me to ?

CHEEZO

SLADDER : That particular belief never happened to stand between me and the top of the tree. Many things did, but they're all down below me now, Mr. Hippanthigh, way down there (*pointing*) where I can hardly see them. You get off that bottom rung as I did years ago.

HIPPANTHIGH : I cannot go back on all I've said.

SLADDER : I don't want to make it hard for you. Only just say you believe in eternal punishment, and then give up talking about it. You may say it to me if you like. We'll have one other person present so that there's no going back on it, my daughter if you like. I'll let the bishop know, and he won't stand in your way any longer, but at present you force his hand. It's you or the rules of the firm.

HIPPANTHIGH : I cannot.

SLADDER : You can't just say to me and my daughter that you believe in eternal punishment, and leave me to go over to Axminster and put it right with the bishop ?

HIPPANTHIGH : I cannot say what I do not believe.

SLADDER : Think. The bishop probably doesn't believe it himself. But you've been forcing his hand,—going out of your way to.

HIPPANTHIGH : I cannot say it.

SLADDER (*rising*) : Mr. Hippanthigh, there's two

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kinds of men, those that succeed, those that don't. I know no other kind. You . . .

HIPPANTHIGH : I cannot go against my conscience.

SLADDER : I don't care what your reason is. You are the second kind. I am sorry my daughter ever loved a man of that sort. I am sorry a man of that sort ever entered my house. I was a little, dirty, ragged boy. You make me see what I would be to-day if I had been a man of your kind. I would be dirty and ragged still. (*His voice has been rising during this speech.*)

[Enter ERMYNTRUDE.]

ERMYNTRUDE : Father ! What are you saying, father ? I heard such loud voices.

[HIPPANTHIGH stands silent and mournful.]

SLADDER : My child, I had foolish ideas for you once, but now I say that you are to marry a man, not a wretched, miserable little curate, who will be a wretched, miserable little curate all his life.

ERMYNTRUDE : Father, I will not hear such words.

SLADDER : I've given him every chance. I've given him more than every chance, but he prefers the bottom rung of the ladder ; there we will leave him.

ERMYNTRUDE : O, father ! How can you be so cruel ?

CHEEZO

SLADDER : It's not my fault, and it's not the bishop's fault. It's his own silly pig-headedness.

[*He goes back to his chair.*

ERMYNTRUDE (*going up to HIPPANTHIGH*) : O, Charlie, couldn't you do what father wants ?

HIPPANTHIGH : No, no, I cannot. He wants me to go back on things I've said.

[Enter MRS. SLADDER carrying a wire cage, with two dead white mice in it.
Also SPLURGE.

MRS. SPLURGE : O, the mice have died, John. The mice have died. O, Ermyntrude's poor mice ! And father's great idea ! Whatever shall we do ?

SLADDER : Er ? (*Almost a groan.*) Eh ? Died have they ?

[*SLADDER ages in his chair. You would say he was beaten. Suddenly he tautens up his muscles and stands up straight with shoulders back and clenched hands.*

So they would beat Sladder, would they ? They would beat Sladder. No, that has yet to be done. We'll go on, Splurge. The public shall eat Cheezo. It's a bit strong perhaps. We'll tone it down with bad nuts that they use for the other cheeses. We'll advertise it, and they'll eat it. See to it, Splurge. They don't beat Sladder.

CHEEZO

MRS. SLADDER : O, I'm so glad. I'm so glad, John.

HIPPANTHIGH (*suddenly with clear emphasis*) : I
THINK I DO BELIEVE IN ETERNAL
PUNISHMENT.

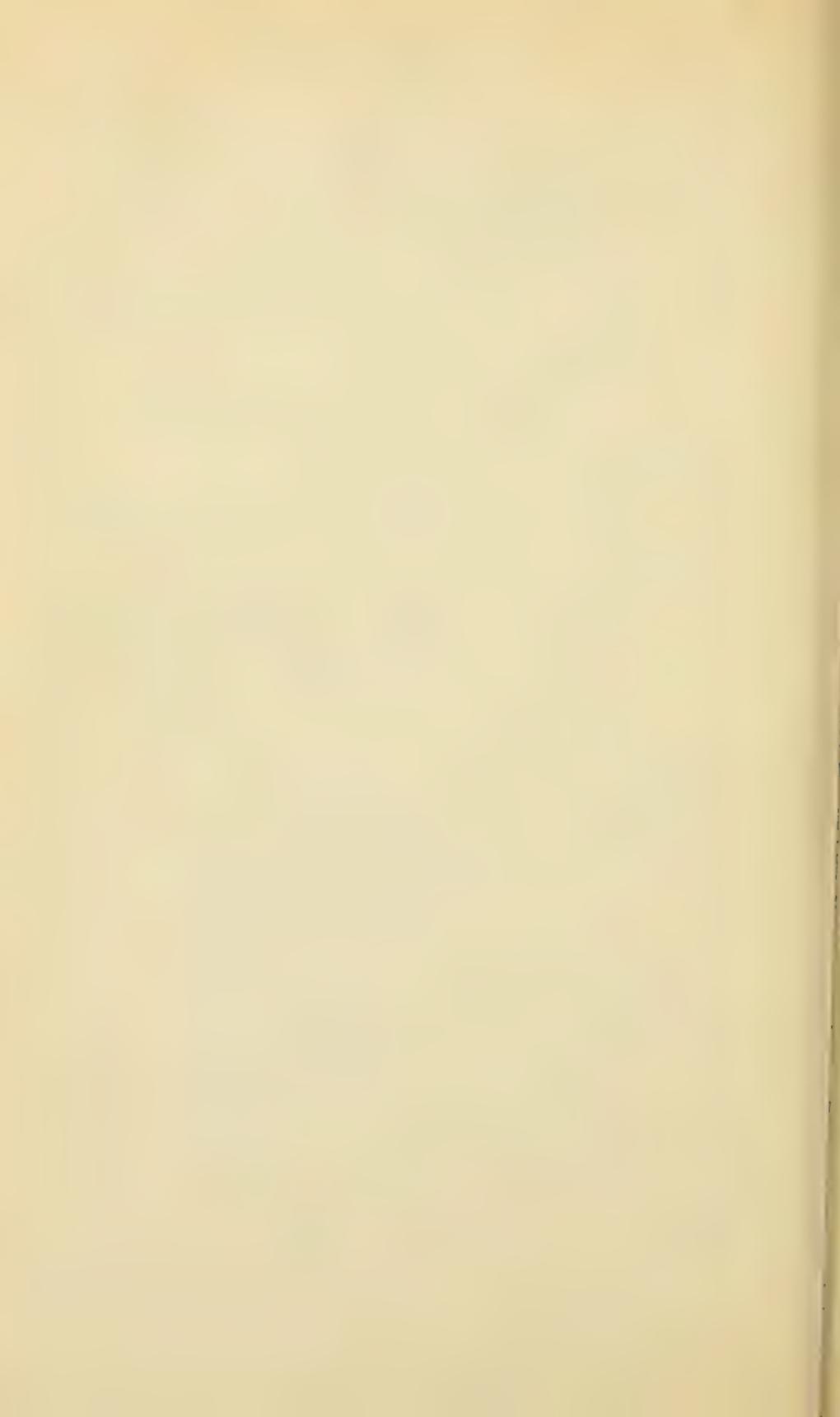
SLADDER : Ah. At last. Well, Ermyntrude, is
your cruel old parent's blessing any use
to you ?

[*He places one hand on her shoulder and
one on Hippanthigh's.*

MRS. SLADDER : Why, Ermyntrude ! Well, I never !
And to think of all this happening in one
day !

[*Hippanthigh is completely beaten.
Ermyntrude is smiling at him. He
puts an arm round her shoulder in
dead silence.*

CURTAIN.



A GOOD BARGAIN

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

BROTHER ANTONINUS.

BROTHER LUCULLUS SEVERUS.

BROTHER GREGORIUS PEDRO.

SATAN.

SMOGGS.

A GOOD BARGAIN

Scene: A Crypt of a Monastery. BROTHER GREGORIUS PEDRO is seated on a stone bench reading. Behind him is a window.

Enter BROTHER LUCULLUS SEVERUS.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: Brother, we may doubt no longer.

GREGORIUS PEDRO: Well?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: It is certain. Certain.

GREGORIUS PEDRO: I too had thought so.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: It is clear now, clear as . . . It is certain.

GREGORIUS PEDRO: Well, why not? After all, why not?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: You mean . . . ?

GREGORIUS PEDRO: 'Tis but a miracle.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: Yes, but . . .

GREGORIUS PEDRO: But you did not think to see one?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS: No, no, not that; but Brother Antoninus . . .

GREGORIUS PEDRO: Well, why not he? He is holy as any, fasts as often as any, wears coarser clothing than most of us, and once scourged a woman because she looked at

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our youngest—scourged her right willingly.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : Yet, Brother Antoninus !

GREGORIUS PEDRO : Yet, why not ?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : We knew him, somehow. One does not know the blessed saints of heaven.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : No, no indeed. I never thought to see such a thing on earth ; and now, now . . . you say it is certain ?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : Certain.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : Ah, well. It seemed like it, it seemed like it for some days. At first I thought I had looked too long through our eastern window, I thought it was the sun that had dazzled my eyes ; and then, then it was clearly something else.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : It is certain now.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : Ah, well.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS (*sitting beside him, sighs*) : I grudge him nothing.

GREGORIUS PEDRO (*a little heavily*) : No, nor I.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : You are sad, brother.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : No, not sad.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : Ah, but I see it.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : Ah, well.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : What grieves you, brother ?

GREGORIUS PEDRO : (*Sighs*) We shall water the

A GOOD BARGAIN

roses no more, he and I. We shall roll the lawns no more. We shall tend the young tulips together never again.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : Oh, why not ? Why not ? There is not all that difference.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : There is.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : It is our cross, brother. We must bear it.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : Ah, yes. Yes, yes.

[*A bell rings noisily.*

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : The gate bell, brother ! Be of good cheer, it is the gate bell ringing !

GREGORIUS PEDRO : Why should I be of good cheer because the gate bell rings ?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : Why, brother, the world is at the gate. We shall see someone. It is an event. Someone will come and speak of the great world. Oh, be of good cheer, be of good cheer, brother.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : I think that I am heavy at heart to-day.

[Enter JOHN SMOGGS.

SLOGGS : Ullo, Governor. Is either o' yer the chief monk ?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : The Reverend Abbot is not here.

SLOGGS : 'Ain't, ain't 'e ?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : But what do you seek, friend ?

SLOGGS : Want to know what you blokes are getting up to.

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LUCULLUS SEVERUS : We do not understand your angry zeal.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : Tell us, friend.

SMOGGS : One o' yer is playing games no end, and we won't 'ave it.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : Games ?

SMOGGS : Well, miracles if you like it better, and we won't 'ave it, nor any of your 'igh church games nor devices.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : What does he say, brother ?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : Friend, you perplex us. We hoped you would speak to us of the great world, its gauds, its wickedness, its—

SMOGGS : We won't 'ave it. We won't 'ave none of it, that's all.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : Tell us, friend, tell us what you mean. Then we will do whatever you ask. And then you shall speak to us of the world.

SMOGGS : There 'e is, there 'e is, the blighter. There 'e is. 'E's coming. O Lord . . . !

[*He turns and runs. Exit.*

GREGORIUS PEDRO : It's Antoninus !

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : Why, yes ; yes, of course !

GREGORIUS PEDRO : He must have seen him over the garden wall.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : We must hush it up.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : Hush it up ?

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LUCULLUS SEVERUS : There must be no scandal in the monastery.

[Enter BROTHER ANTONINUS wearing a halo. He walks across and exits.

[GREGORIUS is gazing with wide eyes.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : There must be no scandal in the monastery.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : It has grown indeed !

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : Yes, it has grown since yesterday.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : I noticed it dimly just three days ago. I noticed it dimly. But I did not—— I could not guess . . . I never dreamed that it would come to this.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : Yes, it has grown for three days.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : It was just a dim light over his head, but now . . . !

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : It flamed up last night.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : There is no mistaking it now.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : There must be *no scandal*.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : No scandal, brother ?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : Look how unusual it is. People will talk. You heard what that man said. They will all talk.

GREGORIUS PEDRO (*sadly*) : Ah, well.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : How could we face it.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : It is, yes, yes,—it is unusual.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : Nothing like it has happened for many centuries.

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GREGORIUS PEDRO (*sadly*) : No, no. I suppose not.
Poor Antoninus.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : Why could he not have waited ?

GREGORIUS PEDRO : Waited ? What ? Three—
three hundred years ?

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : Or even five or ten. He is
long past sixty.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : Yes, yes, it would have been
better.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : You saw how ashamed he was.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : Poor Antoninus. Yes, yes.
Brother, I think if we had not been here
he would have come and sat on this
bench.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : I think he would. But he was
ashamed to come, looking, looking like
that.

GREGORIUS PEDRO : Brother, let us go. It is the
hour at which he loves to come and sit
here, and read in the Little Book of
Lesser Devices. Let us go so that he
may come here and be alone.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS : As you will, brother ; we must
help him when we can.

[They rise and go.]

GREGORIUS PEDRO : Poor Antoninus.

LUCULLUS SEVERUS (*glancing*) : I think he will come
back now.

[*Exeunt. The bare, sandaled foot of
ANTONINUS appears as the last heel
lifts in the other doorway.*]

A GOOD BARGAIN

[Enter ANTONINUS rather timidly. He goes to bench and sits. He sighs. He shakes his head to loosen the halo, but in vain. He sighs. Then he opens his book and reads in silence. Silence gives way to mumbles, mumbles to words.)

ANTONINUS: . . . and finally beat down Satan under our feet.

[Enter SATAN. He has the horns and long hair and beard of a he-goat. His face and voice are such as could have been once in heaven.]

ANTONINUS (standing, lifting arm): In the name of . . .

SATAN: Banish me not.

ANTONINUS: In the name . . .

SATAN: Say nothing you may regret, until I have spoken.

ANTONINUS: In the . . .

SATAN: Hear me.

ANTONINUS: Well?

SATAN: There fell with me from heaven a rare, rare spirit, the light of whose limbs far outshone dawn and evening.

ANTONINUS: Well?

SATAN: We dwell in darkness.

ANTONINUS: What is that to me?

SATAN: For that rare spirit I would have the gaud

A GOOD BARGAIN

you wear, that emblem, that bright ornament. In return I offer you—

ANTONINUS : Begone—

SATAN : I offer you—

ANTONINUS : Begone.

SATAN : I offer you—Youth.

ANTONINUS : I will not traffic with you in damnation.

SATAN : I do not ask your soul, *only that shining gaud*.

ANTONINUS : Such things are not for hell.

SATAN : I offer you Youth.

ANTONINUS : I do not need it. Life is a penance and ordained as a tribulation. I have come through by striving. Why should I care to strive again ?

SATAN (*smiles*) : Why ?

ANTONINUS : Why should I ?

SATAN (*laughs, looking through window*) : It's spring, brother, is it not ?

ANTONINUS : A time for meditation.

SATAN (*laughs*) : There are girls coming over the hills, brother. Through the green leaves and the May.

[ANTONINUS draws his scourge from his robe.

ANTONINUS : Up ! Let me scourge them from our holy place.

SATAN : Wait, brother, they are far off yet. But you would not scourge them, you would

A GOOD BARGAIN

not scourge them, they are so . . . Ah !
one has torn her dress !

ANTONINUS : Ah, let me scourge her !

SATAN : No, no, brother. See, I can see her ankle
through the rent. You would not scourge
her. Your great scourge would break
that little ankle.

ANTONINUS : I will have my scourge ready, if she
comes near our holy place.

SATAN : She is with her comrades. They are
maying. Seven girls. (ANTONINUS *grips his scourge*.) Her arms are full of may.

ANTONINUS : Speak not of such things. Speak not,
I say.

[SATAN is leaning leisurely against the
wall, smiling through the window.]

SATAN : How the leaves are shining. Now she is
seated on the grass. They have gathered
small flowers, Antoninus, and put them
in her hair, a row of primroses.

ANTONINUS (*his eyes go for a moment on to far, far places. Unintentionally*) : What colour ?

SATAN : Black.

ANTONINUS : No, no, no ! I did not mean her hair.
No, no. I meant the flowers.

SATAN : Yellow, Antoninus.

ANTONINUS (*flurried*) : Ah, of course, yes, yes.

SATAN : Sixteen and seventeen and fifteen, and
another of sixteen. All young girls.

A GOOD BARGAIN

The age for you, Antoninus, if I make
you twenty. Just the age for you.

ANTONINUS: You—you cannot.

SATAN: All things are possible unto me except
salvation.

ANTONINUS: How?

SATAN: Give me your gaud. Then meet me at
any hour between star-shining and cock-
crow under the big cherry tree, when
the moon is waning.

ANTONINUS: Never.

SATAN: Ah, Spring, Spring. They are dancing.
Such nimble ankles.

[ANTONINUS raises his scourge.]

SATAN (*more gravely*): Think, Antoninus, forty or
fifty more Springs.

ANTONINUS: Never, never, never.

SATAN: And no more striving next time. See
Antoninus, see them as they dance, there
with the may behind them under the
hill.

ANTONINUS: Never! I will not look.

SATAN: Ah, look at them, Antoninus. Their sweet
figures. And the warm wind blowing
in Spring.

ANTONINUS: Never! My scourge is for such.

[SATAN sighs. *The girls laugh from the
hill. ANTONINUS hears the laughter.*

A look of fear comes over him.

A GOOD BARGAIN

ANTONINUS: Which . . . (*a little peal of girlish laughter off*). Which cherry tree did you speak of?

SATAN: This one over the window.

ANTONINUS (with an effort): It shall be held accursed. I will warn the brethren. It shall be cut down and hewn asunder and they shall burn it utterly.

SATAN (rather sorrowfully): Ah, Antoninus.

ANTONINUS: You shall not tempt a monk of our blessed order.

SATAN: They are coming this way, Antoninus.

ANTONINUS: What! What!

SATAN: Have your scourge ready, Antoninus.

ANTONINUS: Perhaps, perhaps they have not merited extreme chastisement.

SATAN: They have made a garland of may, a long white garland drooped from their little hands. Ah, if you were young, Antoninus.

ANTONINUS: Tempt me not, Satan. I say, tempt me not!

[*The girls sing, SATAN smiles, the girls sing on. ANTONINUS tip-toes to seat, back to window, and sits listening. The girls sing on. They pass the window and shake the branch of a cherry tree. The petals fall in sheets past the window. The girls sing on and ANTONINUS sits listening.*

A GOOD BARGAIN

ANTONINUS (*hand to forehead*): My head aches. I think it is that song. . . . Perhaps, perhaps it is the halo. Too heavy, too heavy for us.

[SATAN walks gently up and removes it and walks away with the gold disc.
ANTONINUS sits silent.

SATAN: When the moon is waning.

[Exit. More petals fall past the window. The song rings on. **ANTONINUS** sits quite still, on his face a new ecstasy.

CURTAIN.

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

SIR WEBLEY WOOTHERY-JURNIP }
MR. NEEKS } *Members of the
Olympus.*

JERGINS, *an old waiter.*

MR. TRUNDLEBEN, *Secretary of the Club.*

MR. GEEK, *Editor of the "Banner and Evening
Gazette," and member of the Olympus.*

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

Scene : A room in the Olympus Club.

Time : After luncheon.

SIR WEBLEY WOOTHERRY-JURNIP and MR. NEEKS sit by a small table. Further away sits MR. GLEEK, the Editor of the "Banner and Evening Gazette." SIR WEBLEY JURNIP rises and rings the bell by the fire-place. He returns to his seat.

MR. NEEKS : I see there's a man called Mr. William Shakespeare putting up for the Club.

SIR WEBLEY : Shakespeare ? Shakespeare ? Shakespeare ? I once knew a man called Shaker.

NEEKS : No, it's Shakespeare—Mr. William Shakespeare.

SIR WEBLEY : Shakespeare ? Shakespeare ? Do you know anything about him ?

NEEKS : Well, I don't exactly recall—I made sure that you—

SIR WEBLEY : The Secretary ought to be more careful. Waiter !

JERGINS : Yes, Sir Webley. [He comes.]

SIR WEBLEY : Coffee, Jergins. Same as usual.

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

JERGINS : Yes, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY : And, Jergins—there's a man called Mr. William Shakespeare putting up for the Club.

JERGINS : I'm sorry to hear that, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY : Yes, Jergins. Well, there it is, you see; and I want you to go up and ask Mr. Trundleben if he'd come down.

JERGINS : Certainly, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY : And then get my coffee.

JERGINS : Yes, Sir Webley.

[He goes slowly away.]

NEEKS : He'll be able to tell us all about him.

SIR WEBLEY : At the same time he should be more careful.

NEEKS : I'm afraid—I'm afraid he's getting rather, rather old.

SIR WEBLEY : Oh, I don't know, he was seventy only the other day. I don't call that too old nowadays. He can't be now, he can't be more than, let me see, seventy-eight. Where does this Mr. Shaker live?

NEEKS : Shakespeare. Somewhere down in Warwickshire. A village called Bradford, I think, is the address he gives in the Candidates' Book.

SIR WEBLEY : Warwickshire! I do seem to remember something about him now. If he's the same man I certainly do. William Shakespeare, you said.

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

NEEKS: Yes, that's the name.

SIR WEBLEY: Well, I certainly have heard about him now you mention it.

NEEKS: Really! And what does he do?

SIR WEBLEY: Do? Well, from what I heard he poaches.

NEEKS: Poaches!

SIR WEBLEY: Yes, a poacher. Trundleben deserves to get the sack for this. A poacher from the wilds of Warwickshire. I heard all about him. He got after the deer at Charlecote.

NEEKS: A poacher!

SIR WEBLEY: That's all he is, a poacher. A member of the Olympus! He'll be dropping in here one fine day with other people's rabbits in his pockets.

[Enter JERGINS.]

JERGINS: Your coffee, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY: My coffee. I should think so. (*He sips it.*) One needs it.

JERGINS: Mr. Trundleben will be down at once, Sir Webley. I telephoned up to him.

SIR WEBLEY: Telephoned! Telephoned! The Club's getting more full of new-fangled devices every day. I remember the time when—— Thank you, Jergins.

[JERGINS retires.]

This is a pretty state of things, Neeks.

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

NEEKS : A pretty state of things indeed, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY : Ah, here's Trundleben.

NEEKS : He'll tell us all about it, Sir Webley. I'm sure he'll—

SIR WEBLEY : Ah, Trundleben. Come and sit down here. Come and—

TRUNDLEBEN : Thank you, Sir Webley. I think I will. I don't walk quite as well as I used, and what with—

SIR WEBLEY : What's all this we hear about this Mr. Shakespeare, Trundleben ?

TRUNDLEBEN : Oh, ah, well yes, yes indeed. Well, you see, Sir Webley, he was put up for the Club. Mr. Henry put him up.

SIR WEBLEY (*disapprovingly*) : Oh, Mr. Henry.

NEEKS : Yes, yes, yes. Long hair and all that.

SIR WEBLEY : I'm afraid so.

NEEKS : Writes poetry, I believe.

SIR WEBLEY : I'm afraid so.

TRUNDLEBEN : Well then, what does Mr. Newton do but go and second him, and there you are, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY : Yes, a pretty state of things. Has he . . . Does he . . . What is he ?

TRUNDLEBEN : He seems to write, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY : Oh, he does, does he ? What does he write ?

TRUNDLEBEN : Well, I wrote and asked him that, Sir Webley, and *he* said plays.

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

SIR WEBLEY : Plays ? Plays ? Plays ? I'm sure I never heard . . . What plays ?

TRUNDLEBEN : I asked him that, Sir Webley, and he said . . . he sent me a list (*fumbling*). Ah, here it is.

[He holds it high, far from his face, tilts his head back and looks down his nose through his glasses.]

He says—let me see—“Hamelt,” or “Hamlet,” I don’t know how he pronounces it. “Hamelt, Hamlet”; he spells it “H-a-m-l-e-t.” If you pronounce it the way one pronounces handle, it would be “Hamelt,” but if—

SIR WEBLEY : What’s it all about ?

TRUNDLEBEN : Well, I gathered the scene was in Denmark.

NEEKS : Denmark ! H’m ! another of those neutrals !

SIR WEBLEY : Well, I wouldn’t so much mind where the scene of the play was put, if only it was a play one ever had heard of.

NEEKS : But those men who have much to do with neutrals are rather the men—don’t you think, Sir Webley ?—who . . .

SIR WEBLEY : Who want watching. I believe you’re right, Neeks. And that type of unsuccessful play-wright is just the kind of man I always rather . . .

NEEKS : That’s rather what I feel, Sir Webley.

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SIR WEBLEY: It wouldn't be a bad plan if we told somebody about him.

NEEKS: I think I know just the man, Sir Webley. I'll just drop him a line.

SIR WEBLEY: Yes, and if he's all right there's no harm done, but I always suspect that kind of fellow. Well, what else, Trundleben? This is getting interesting.

TRUNDLEBEN: Well, Sir Webley, it's really very funny, but he sent me a list of the characters in this play of his, "Hamelt," and, and it's really rather delicious—

NEEKS: Yes?

SIR WEBLEY: Yes? What is it?

TRUNDLEBEN: He's got a *ghost* in his play. (*He-he-he-he*) A ghost! He really has.

SIR WEBLEY: What! Not on the stage?

TRUNDLEBEN: Yes, on the stage!

NEEKS: Well, well, well.

SIR WEBLEY: But that's absurd.

TRUNDLEBEN: I met Mr. Vass the other day—it was his four hundredth presentation of "The Nighty"—and I told him about it. He said that bringing a ghost on the stage was, of course—er—ludicrous.

SIR WEBLEY: What else does he say he's done?

TRUNDLEBEN: Er—er—there's an absurdly long lis—er—"Macbeth."

SIR WEBLEY: "Macbeth." That's Irish.

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

NEEKS : Ah, yes. Abbey Theatre style of thing.

TRUNDLEBEN : I think I heard he offered it them.
But of course—

SIR WEBLEY : No, quite so.

TRUNDLEBEN : I gathered it was all rather a—rather
a sordid story.

SIR WEBLEY (*solemnly*) : Ah !

[NEEK with equal solemnity wags his head.]

TRUNDLEBEN (*focussing his list again*) : Here's a very
funny one. This is funnier than
“Hamlet.” “The Tempest.” And the
stage directions are “The sea, with a
ship.”

SIR WEBLEY (*laughs*) : Oh, that's lovely ! That's
really too good. The sea with a ship !
And what's it all about ?

TRUNDLEBEN : Well, I rather gathered that it was
about a magician, and he—he makes a
storm.

SIR WEBLEY : He makes a storm. Splendid ! On
the stage, I suppose.

TRUNDLEBEN : Oh yes, on the stage.

[SIR WEBLEY and NEEK laugh heartily.]

NEEKS : He'd . . . He'd have to be a magician for
that, wouldn't he ?

SIR WEBLEY : Ha, ha ! Very good ! He'd have to
be a magician to do that, Trundleben.

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TRUNDLEBEN : Yes, indeed, Sir Webley ; indeed he would, Mr. Neeks.

SIR WEBLEY : But that stage direction is priceless. I'd really like to copy that down if you'd let me. What is it ? "The sea with a ship" ? It's the funniest bit of the lot.

TRUNDLEBEN : Yes, that's it, Sir Webley. Wait a moment, I have it here. The—the whole thing is "the sea with a ship, afterwards an island." Very funny indeed.

SIR WEBLEY : "Afterwards an island" ! That's very good, too. "Afterwards an island." I'll put that down also. (*He writes.*) And what else, Trundleben ? What else ?

[TRUNDLEBEN holds out his list again.]

TRUNDLEBEN : "The Tragedy of—of King Richard the—the Second."

SIR WEBLEY : But *was* his life a tragedy ? *Was* it a tragedy, Neeks ?

NEEKS : I—I—well I'm not quite sure ; I really don't think so. But I'll look it up.

SIR WEBLEY : Yes, we can look it up.

TRUNDLEBEN : I think it was rather—perhaps *rather* tragic, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY : Oh, I don't say it wasn't. No doubt. No doubt at all. That's one thing.

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But to call his whole life a tragedy is—is quite another. What, Neeks?

NEEKS: Oh, quite another.

TRUNDLEBEN: Oh, certainly, Sir Webley. Tragedy is—er—is a very strong term indeed, to—to apply to such a case.

SIR WEBLEY: He was probably out poaching when he should have been learning his history.

TRUNDLEBEN: I'm afraid so, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY: And what else, eh? Anything more?

TRUNDLEBEN: Well, there are some poems, he says.

[*Holds up a list.*

SIR WEBLEY: And what are they about?

TRUNDLEBEN: Well, there's one called . . . Oh. I'd really rather not mention that one; perhaps that had better be left out altogether.

NEEKS: Not . . . ?

SIR WEBLEY: Not quite . . . ?

TRUNDLEBEN: No, not at all.

SIR WEBLEY and NEEKS: H'm.

TRUNDLEBEN: Left out altogether. And then there are "Sonnets," and—and "Venus and Adonis," and—and "The Phœnix and the Turtle."

SIR WEBLEY: The Phœnix and the what?

TRUNDLEBEN: The Turtle.

SIR WEBLEY: Oh. Go on . . .

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TRUNDLEBEN : One called "The Passionate Pilgrim,"
another "A Lover's Complaint."

SIR WEBLEY : I think the whole thing's very regrettable.

NEEKS : I think so too, Sir Webley.

TRUNDLEBEN (*mournfully*) : And there've been no poets since poor Browning died, none at all. It's absurd for him to call himself a poet.

NEEKS : Quite so, Trundleben, quite so.

SIR WEBLEY : And all these plays. What does he mean by calling them plays ? They've never been acted.

TRUNDLEBEN : Well—er—no, not exactly acted, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY : What do you mean by not exactly, Trundleben ?

TRUNDLEBEN : Well, I believe they were acted in America, though of course not in London.

SIR WEBLEY : In America ? What's that got to do with it. America ? Why, that's the other side of the Atlantic.

TRUNDLEBEN : Oh, yes, Sir WEBLEY, I—I quite agree with you.

SIR WEBLEY : America ! I daresay they did. I daresay they did act them. But that doesn't make him a suitable member for the Olympus. Quite the contrary.

NEEKS : Oh, quite the contrary.

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

TRUNDLEBEN : Oh, certainly, Sir Webley, certainly.

SIR WEBLEY : I daresay "Macbeth" would be the sort of thing that would appeal to Irish Americans. *Just* the sort of thing.

TRUNDLEBEN : Very likely, Sir Webley, I'm sure.

SIR WEBLEY : Their game laws are very lax, I believe, over there ; they probably took to him on account of his being a poacher.

TRUNDLEBEN : I've no doubt of it, Sir Webley.
Very likely.

NEEKS : I expect that was just it.

SIR WEBLEY : Well now, Trundleben ; are we to ask the Olympus to elect a man who'll come in here with his pockets bulging with rabbits?

NEEKS : Rabbits, and hares too.

SIR WEBLEY : And venison even, if you come to that.

TRUNDLEBEN : Yes indeed, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY : Thank God the Olympus can get its haunch of venison without having to go to a man like that for it.

NEEKS : Yes indeed.

TRUNDLEBEN : Indeed I hope so.

SIR WEBLEY : Well now, about those plays. I don't say we've absolute proof that the man's entirely hopeless. We must be sure of our ground.

NEEKS : Yes, quite so.

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

TRUNDLEBEN : Oh, I'm afraid Sir Webley, they're very bad indeed. There are some quite unfortunate—er—references in them.

SIR WEBLEY : So I should have supposed. So I should have supposed.

NEEKS : Yes, yes, of course.

TRUNDLEBEN : For instance, in that play about that funny ship—I have a list of the characters here—and I'm afraid, well—er,—er you see for yourself. (*Hands paper.*) You see that is, I am afraid, in very bad taste, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY : Certainly, Trundleben, certainly. Very bad indeed.

NEEKS (*peering*) : Er—er, what is it, Sir Webley ?

SIR WEBLEY (*pointing*) : That, you see.

NEEKS : A—a drunken butler ! But most regrettable.

SIR WEBLEY : A very deserving class. A—a quite gratuitous slight. I don't say you mightn't see one drunken butler . . .

TRUNDLEBEN : Quite so.

NEEKS : Yes, of course.

SIR WEBLEY : But to put it boldly on a programme like that is practically tantamount to implying that all butlers are drunken.

TRUNDLEBEN : Which is by no means true.

SIR WEBLEY : There would naturally be a protest of some sort, and to have a member of

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

the Olympus mixed up with a controversy like that would be—er—naturally —er—most . . .

TRUNDLEBEN: Yes, of course, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY: And then of course, if he does a thing like that once . . .

NEEKS: There are probably other lapses just as deplorable.

TRUNDLEBEN: I haven't gone through his whole list, Sir Webley. I often feel about these modern writers that perhaps the less one looks the less one will find that might be, er . . .

SIR WEBLEY: Yes, quite so.

NEEKS: That is certainly true.

SIR WEBLEY: Well, we can't wade all through his list of characters to see if they are all suitable to be represented on a stage.

TRUNDLEBEN: Oh no, Sir Webley, quite impossible; there are—there are—I might say—hundreds of them.

SIR WEBLEY: Good gracious! He must have been wasting his time a great deal.

TRUNDLEBEN: Oh, a great deal, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY: But we shall have to go further into this. We can't have . . .

NEEKS: I see Mr. Gleek sitting over there, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY: Why, yes, yes, so he is.

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NEEKS : The *Banner and Evening Gazette* would know all about him if there's anything to know.

SIR WEBLEY : Yes, of course they would.

NEEKS : If we were to ask him.

SIR WEBLEY : Well, Trundleben, you may leave it to us. Mr. Neeks and I will talk it all over and see what's to be done.

TRUNDBLEBEN : Thank you, Sir Webley. I'm really very sorry it all happened—very sorry indeed.

SIR WEBLEY : Very well, Trundleben, we'll see what's to be done. If nothing's known of him and his plays, you'll have to write and request him to withdraw his candidature. But we'll see. We'll see.

TRUNDBLEBEN : Thank you, Sir Webley. I'm sure I'm very sorry it all occurred. Thank you, Mr. Neeks.

[*Exit TRUNDBLEBEN, waddling slowly away.*

SIR WEBLEY : Well, Neeks, that's what it will have to be. If nothing whatever's known of him we can't have him putting up for the Olympus.

NEEKS : Quite so, Sir Webley. I'll call Mr. Gleek's attention.

[*He begins to rise, hopefully looking Gleek-wards, when JERGINS comes between him and MR. GLEEK. He has come to take away the coffee.*

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SIR WEBLEY: Times are changing, Jergins.

JERGINS: I'm afraid so, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY: Changing fast, and new members putting up for the Club.

JERGINS: Yes, I'm afraid so, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY: You notice it too, Jergins.

JERGINS: Yes, Sir Webley, it's come all of a sudden.
Only last week I saw . . .

SIR WEBLEY: Well, Jergins.

JERGINS: I saw Lord Pondleburrow wearing a . . .

SIR WEBLEY: Wearing what, Jergins ?

JERGINS: Wearing one of those billycock hats, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY: Well, well. I suppose they've got to change, but not at that rate.

JERGINS: No, Sir Webley.

[*Exit, shaking his head as he goes.*

SIR WEBLEY: Well, we must find out about this fellow.

NEEKS: Yes. I'll call Mr. Gleek's attention. He knows all about that sort of thing.

SIR WEBLEY: Yes, yes. Just . . .

[*NEEKS rises and goes some of the way towards GLEEK's chair.*

NEEKS: Er—er——

GLEEK (*looking round*): Yes ?

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SIR WEBLEY : Do you know anything of a man called
Mr. William Shakespeare ?

GLEEK (*looking over his pince-nez*) : No !

[*He shakes his head several times and returns to his paper.*]

CURTAIN.

FAME AND THE POET

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

HARRY DE REVES, *a Poet.*

(*This name, though of course of French origin, has become anglicised and is pronounced DE REEVES.*)

DICK PRATTLE, *a Lieutenant-Major of the Royal Horse Marines.*

FAME.

FAME AND THE POET

Scene: The Poet's rooms in London. Windows in back. A high screen in a corner.

Time: February 30th.

The Poet is sitting at a table writing.

[Enter DICK PRATTLE.]

PRATTLE: Hullo, Harry.

DE REVES: Hullo, Dick. Good Lord, where are you from?

PRATTLE (*casually*): The ends of the earth.

DE REVES: Well, I'm damned!

PRATTLE: Thought I'd drop in and see how you were getting on.

DE REVES: Well, that's splendid. What are you doing in London?

PRATTLE: Well, I wanted to see if I could get one or two decent ties to wear—you can get nothing out there—then I thought I'd have a look and see how London was getting on.

DE REVES: Splendid! How's everybody?

PRATTLE: All going strong.

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DE REVES : That's good.

PRATTLE (*seeing paper and ink*) : But what are you doing ?

DE REVES : Writing.

PRATTLE : Writing ? I didn't know you wrote.

DE REVES : Yes, I've taken to it rather.

PRATTLE : I say—writing's no good. What do you write ?

DE REVES : Oh, poetry.

PRATTLE : Poetry ! Good Lord !

DE REVES : Yes, that sort of thing, you know.

PRATTLE : Good Lord ! Do you make any money by it ?

DE REVES : No. Hardly any.

PRATTLE : I say—why don't you chuck it ?

DE REVES : Oh, I don't know. Some people seem to like my stuff, rather. That's why I go on.

PRATTLE : I'd chuck it if there's no money in it.

DE REVES : Ah, but then it's hardly in your line, is it ? You'd hardly approve of poetry if there *was* money in it.

PRATTLE : Oh, I don't say that. If I could make as much by poetry as I can by betting I don't say I wouldn't try the poetry touch, only—

DE REVES : Only what ?

PRATTLE : Oh, I don't know. Only there seems more sense in betting, somehow.

FAME AND THE POET

DE REVES: Well, yes. I suppose it's easier to tell what an earthly horse is going to do, than to tell what Pegasus—

PRATTLE: What's Pegasus?

DE REVES: Oh, the winged horse of poets.

PRATTLE: I say! You don't believe in a winged horse, do you?

DE REVES: In our trade we believe in all fabulous things. They all represent some large truth to us. An emblem like Pegasus is as real a thing to a poet as a Derby winner would be to you.

PRATTLE: I say. (Give me a cigarette. Thanks.) What? Then you'd believe in nymphs and fauns, and Pan, and all those kind of birds?

DE REVES: Yes. Yes. In all of them.

PRATTLE: Good Lord!

DE REVES: You believe in the Lord Mayor of London, don't you?

PRATTLE: Yes, of course; but what has—

DE REVES: Four million people or so made him Lord Mayor, didn't they? And he represents to them the wealth and dignity and tradition of—

PRATTLE: Yes; but, I say, what has all this—

DE REVES: Well, he stands for an idea to them, and they made him Lord Mayor, and so he is one . . .

FAME AND THE POET

PRATTLE: Well, of course he is.

DE REVES: In the same way Pan has been made what he is by millions ; by millions to whom he represents world-old traditions.

PRATTLE (*rising from his chair and stepping backwards, laughing and looking at the Poet in a kind of assumed wonder*): I say . . . I say . . . You old heathen . . . but Good Lord . . .

[*He bumps into the high screen behind, pushing it back a little.*

DE REVES: Look out ! Look out !

PRATTLE: What ? What's the matter ?

DE REVES: The screen !

PRATTLE: Oh, sorry, yes. I'll put it right.

[*He is about to go round behind it.*

DE REVES: No, don't go round there.

PRATTLE: What ? Why not ?

DE REVES: Oh, you wouldn't understand.

PRATTLE: Wouldn't understand ? Why, what have you got ?

DE REVES: Oh, one of those things. . . . You wouldn't understand.

PRATTLE: Of course I'd understand. Let's have a look.

[*The Poet walks towards PRATTLE and the screen. He protests no further.*

PRATTLE looks round the corner of the screen.

An altar.

FAME AND THE POET

DE REVES (*removing the screen altogether*) : That is all.
What do you make of it ?

[*An altar of Greek design, shaped like a pedestal, is revealed. Papers litter the floor all about it.*

PRATTLE : I say—you always were an untidy devil.

DE REVES : Well, what do you make of it ?

PRATTLE : It reminds me of your room at Eton.

DE REVES : My room at Eton ?

PRATTLE : Yes, you always had papers all over your floor.

DE REVES : Oh, yes—

PRATTLE : And what are these ?

DE REVES : All these are poems ; and this is my altar to Fame.

PRATTLE : To Fame ?

DE REVES : The same that Homer knew.

PRATTLE : Good Lord !

DE REVES : Keats never saw her. Shelley died too young. She came late at the best of times, now scarcely ever.

PRATTLE : But, my dear fellow, you don't mean that you think there really is such a person ?

DE REVES : I offer all my songs to her.

PRATTLE : But you don't mean you think you could actually *see* Fame ?

DE REVES : We poets personify abstract things, and

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not poets only but sculptors and painters too. All the great things of the world are those abstract things.

PRATTLE: But what I mean is, they're not really there, like you or me.

DE REVES: To us these things are more real than men, they outlive generations, they watch the passing of kingdoms: we go by them like dust; they are still there, unmoved, unsmiling.

PRATTLE: But, but, you can't think that you could *see* Fame, you don't expect to *see* it?

DE REVES: Not to me. Never to me. She of the golden trumpet and Greek dress will never appear to me. . . . We all have our dreams.

PRATTLE: I say—what have you been doing all day?

DE REVES: I? Oh, only writing a sonnet.

PRATTLE: Is it a long one?

DE REVES: Not very.

PRATTLE: About how long is it?

DE REVES: About fourteen lines.

PRATTLE (*impressively*): I tell you what it is.

DE REVES: Yes?

PRATTLE: I tell you what. You've been over-working yourself. I once got like that on board the Sandhurst, working for the passing-out exam. I got so bad that I could have seen anything.

FAME AND THE POET

DE REVES : Seen anything ?

PRATTLE : Lord, yes ; horned pigs, snakes with wings ; anything ; one of your winged horses even. They gave me some stuff called bromide for it. You take a rest.

DE REVES : But my dear fellow, you don't understand at all. I merely said that abstract things are to a poet as near and real and visible as one of your bookmakers or barmaids.

PRATTLE : I know. You take a rest.

DE REVES : Well, perhaps I will. I'd come with you to that musical comedy you're going to see, only I'm a bit tired after writing this ; it's a tedious job. I'll come another night.

PRATTLE : How do you know I'm going to see a musical comedy ?

DE REVES : Well, where would you go ? *Hamlet's* on at the Lord Chamberlain's. You're not going there.

PRATTLE : Do I look like it ?

DE REVES : No.

PRATTLE : Well, you're quite right. I'm going to see "The Girl from Bedlam." So long. I must push off now. It's getting late. You take a rest. Don't add another line to that sonnet ; fourteen's quite enough. You take a rest. Don't have any dinner to-night, just rest. I was like that once myself. So long.

FAME AND THE POET

DE REVES : So long.

[*Exit PRATTLE.* DE REVES returns to his table and sits down.]

Good old Dick ! He's the same as ever.
Lord, how time passes.

He takes his pen and his sonnet and makes a few alterations.

Well, that's finished. I can't do any more to it.

[*He rises and goes to the screen ; he draws back part of it and goes up to the altar. He is about to place his sonnet reverently at the foot of the altar amongst his other verses.*

No, I will not put it there. This one is worthy of the altar.

[*He places the sonnet upon the altar itself.*
If that sonnet does not give me fame, nothing that I have done before will give it to me, nothing that I ever will do.

[*He replaces the screen and returns to his chair at the table. Twilight is coming on. He sits with his elbow on the table, his head on his hand, or however the actor pleases.*

Well, well. Fancy seeing Dick again.
Well, Dick enjoys his life, so he's no fool.
What was that he said ? "There's no money in poetry. You'd better chuck it." Ten years' work and what have I

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to show for it ? The admiration of men who care for poetry, and how many of *them* are there ? There's a bigger demand for smoked glasses to look at eclipses of the sun. Why should Fame come to me ? Haven't I given up my days for her ? That is enough to keep her away. I am a poet ; that is enough reason for her to slight me. Proud and aloof and cold as marble, what does Fame care for us ? Yes, Dick is right. It's a poor game chasing illusions, hunting the intangible, pursuing dreams. Dreams ? Why, we are ourselves dreams.

[*He leans back in his chair.*

We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

[*He is silent for a while. Suddenly he lifts his head.*

My room at Eton, Dick said. An untidy mess.

[*As he lifts his head and says these words, twilight gives place to broad daylight, merely as a hint that the author of the play may have been mistaken, and the whole thing may have been no more than a poet's dream.*

So it was, and it's an untidy mess there (*looking at screen*) too. Dick's right.

FAME AND THE POET

I'll tidy it up. I'll burn the whole damned heap,

[*He advances impetuously towards the screen.*

every damned poem that I was ever fool enough to waste my time on.

[*He pushes back the screen. FAME in a Greek dress with a long golden trumpet in her hand is seen standing motionless on the altar like a marble goddess.*

So . . . you have come !

[*For a while he stands thunderstruck. Then he approaches the altar.*

Divine fair lady, you have come.

[*He holds up his hand to her and leads her down from the altar and into the centre of the stage. At whatever moment the actor finds it most convenient, he repossesses himself of the sonnet that he had placed on the altar. He now offers it to FAME.*

This is my sonnet. Is it well done ?

[*FAME takes it and reads it in silence, while the POET watches her rapturously.*

FAME : You're a bit of all right.

DE REVES : What ?

FAME : Some poet.

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DE REVES: I—I—scarcely . . . understand.

FAME: You're IT.

DE REVES: But . . . it is not possible . . . are you she that knew Homer?

FAME: Homer? Lord, yes. Blind old bat, 'e couldn't see a yard.

DE REVES: O Heavens!

[*FAME walks beautifully to the window.
She opens it and puts her head out.*

FAME (*in a voice with which a woman in an upper storey would cry for help if the house was well alight*): Hi! Hi! Boys! Hi! Say, folks! Hi!

[*The murmur of a gathering crowd is heard. FAME blows her trumpet.*

FAME: Hi, he's a poet! (*Quickly, over her shoulder.*) What's your name?

DE REVES: De Reves.

FAME: His name's de Reves.

DE REVES: Harry de Reves.

FAME: His pals call him Harry.

THE CROWD: Hooray! Hooray! Hooray!

FAME: Say, what's your favourite colour?

DE REVES: I . . . I . . . I don't quite understand.

FAME: Well, which do you like best, green or blue

FAME AND THE POET

DE REVES : Oh—er—blue.

[*She blows her trumpet out of the window.*

No—er—I think green.

FAME : Green is his favourite colour.

THE CROWD : Hooray ! Hooray ! Hooray !

FAME : 'Ere, tell us something. They want to know all about yer.

DE REVES : Wouldn't you perhaps . . . would they care to hear my sonnet, if you would—er . . .

FAME (*picking up quill*) : Here, what's this ?

DE REVES : Oh, that's my pen.

FAME (*after another blast on her trumpet*) : He writes with a quill.

[*Cheers from the Crowd.*

FAME (*going to a cupboard*) : Here, what have you got in here ?

DE REVES : Oh . . . er . . . those are my breakfast things.

FAME (*finding a dirty plate*) : What have yer had on this one ?

DE REVES (*mournfully*) : Oh, eggs and bacon.

FAME (*at the window*) : He has eggs and bacon for breakfast.

THE CROWD : Hip hip hip, *hooray !*
Hip hip hip, *hooray !*
Hip hip hip, *hooray !*

FAME : Hi, and what's this ?

FAME AND THE POET

DE REVES (*miserably*) : Oh, a golf stick.

FAME : He's a man's man ! He's a virile man !
He's a manly man !

[*Wild cheers from the Crowd, this time only from women's voices.*]

DE REVES : Oh, this is terrible. This is terrible.
This is terrible.

[FAME gives another peal on her horn.
She is about to speak.]

DE REVES (*solemnly and mournfully*) : One moment,
one moment . . .

FAME : Well, out with it.

DE REVES : For ten years, divine lady, I have worshipped you, offering all my songs . . .
I find . . . I find I am not worthy . . .

FAME : Oh, you're all right.

DE REVES : No, no, I am not worthy. It cannot be.
It cannot possibly be. Others deserve you more. I must say it ! I cannot possibly love you. Others are worthy. You will find others. But I, no, no, no. It cannot be. It cannot be. Oh, pardon me, but it must not.

[Meanwhile FAME has been lighting one of his cigarettes. She sits in a comfortable chair, leans right back, and puts her feet right up on the table amongst the poet's papers.]

FAME AND THE POET

Oh, I fear I offend you. But—it cannot be.

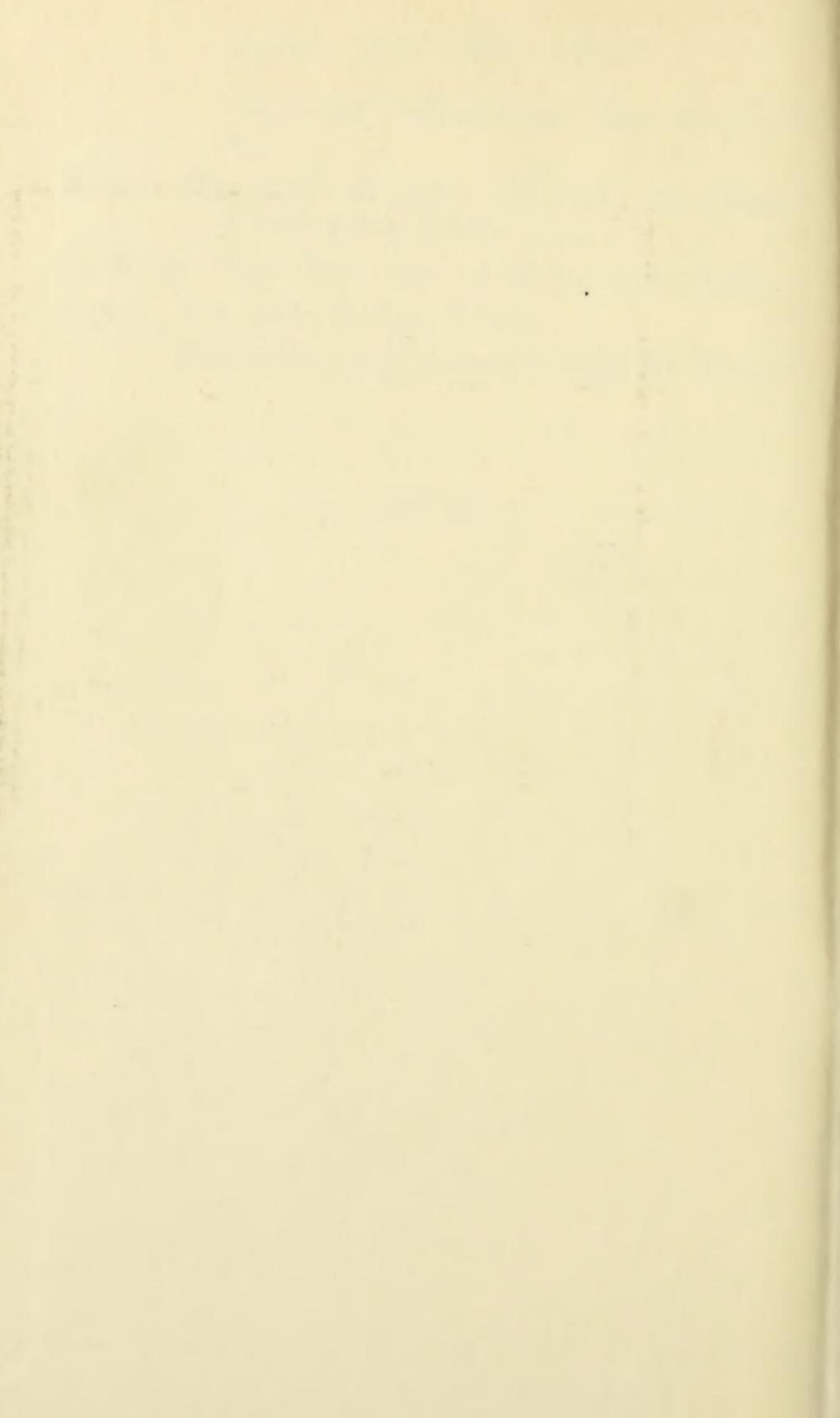
FAME: Oh, that's all right, old bird ; no offence.
I ain't going to leave you.

DE REVES: But—but—but—I do not understand.

FAME: I've come to stay, I have.

[*She blows a puff of smoke through her trumpet.*

CURTAIN.



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Dunsany, Edward John Moreton
Drax Plunkett, 18th baron
Plays of near & far

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